DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 388 388 PS 023 647

AUTHOR	Gammage, Philip, Ed.; Meighan, Janet, Ed.
TITLE	Early Childhood Education: The Way Forward.
REPORT NO	ISBN-1-871526-21-3
PUB DATE	95
NOTE	138p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Education Now Books, 113 Arundel Drive, Bramcote Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FQ, England, United Kingdom.
PUB TYPE	Books (010) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Child Rearing; Day Care; *Early Childhood Education; Educational Facilities; Educational Quality; *Family School Relationship; Foreign Countries; Inclusive Schools; Parent Participation; Parent School Relationship; Partnerships in Education; Professional Development; Teacher Education; Teaching Methods; Young Children
IDENTIFIERS	Developmentally Appropriate Programs; *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

Drawing on experiences in North America, the United Kingdom, and other countries, this book examines the debate over the overall vision for early childhood education. The nature and quality of the United Kingdom's and other countries' culture is questioned in respect to the future it provides for children. The question of who is able to provide a consistent, caring environment for children in light of societal changes is raised. Noting that early childhood issues are currently being placed high on the political agendas of many countries, this book examines methods for improving the situation for today's and future children. The argument is not concerning whether there should be more high-quality and well-funded facilities for young child care, but rather, what is the best way to implement facilities and to train staff. The book includes the following chapters: (1) "Expanding Combined Nursery Provision: Bridging the Gap between Care and Education" (Iram Siraj-Blatchford); (2) "Developing Appropriate Home-School Partnerships" (Jennifer Little and Janet Meighan); (3) "Stories from the Classroom: What works? Developmentally Appropriate Practice" (Jennifer Little); (4) "Questions of Quality" (Tony Bertram and Christine Pascal); (5) "Integration: Children of All Abilities Working Together in an Inclusive Classroom" (Shannon Lee Fletcher); (6) "Initial Teacher Education" (Philip Gammage); and (7) "The Continuing Professional Development of Early Childhood Educators: Planning Contexts and Development Principles" (Christopher Day). Each chapter contains references. (BGC)

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Early Childhood Education: The Way Forward

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Published 1995 by Education Now Publishing Co-operative
P.O.Box 186, Derby

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British Cataloguing in Publication Data

Gammage, Philip and Meighan, Janet

Early Childhood Education
The Way Forward

I. Title

372.942

ISBN 1 871526 21-3

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Design and production: Janet Meighan for Education Now Books

Printed by Mastaprint, Stapleford, Nottingham

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Education Now is a forum in which people with differing, diverse and undogmatic views can develop ideas about constructive alternatives to the existing regressive forms of education, through open debate and publishing.

Early Childhood Education: The Way Forward

Introduction

In many countries, whether we approve or not, structures are changing. Something approaching one in three marriages in England now end in divorce and lone parents constitute 19%, or one in five, of all families. Children who experience family disruption are more likely to suffer social, educational and health problems than a comparable sample whose families remain intact. This is not to apportion blame, simply to remind ourselves that critical social changes are occurring. Such changes are similar in North America and throughout many parts of the post-industrial world. In addition, modern children are born into markedly smaller families, where women work of necessity. We can also save and support deformed and apparently maladaptive children with much greater facility than ever before, with all the ensuing ethical, moral and social consequences. Our children are born into media-rich societies and are bombarded with advertising pressures from a very early age. Who, then, is able to provide, or assist in providing, a consistent, caring, benign environment for our young? Should such provision be left to chance, to haphazard circumstances, to market forces, or should its need now be fully recognised, planned for and carefully implemented?

The answers to the above questions are clear in the legislation and commitment of countless countries. Some, like France, have over a century of such firm commitment as part of their history. But, whatever the tradition, early childhood education and care are issues currently high on many political agendas. Few can any longer dispute that changing family and social circumstances now make it imperative that societies systematically provide high quality, well-funded, appropriately resourced facilities for our young. This not to deny that some families can themselves provide these and will do so as a matter of principle and belief, even taking on the duties of statutory educational provision at times. However, it is not our intention to discuss this latter growing, but important, group; rather, here we wish to emphasise that many families have a need of such facilities and that many young mothers have to be back at work within a year or so of their child's birth.

The contributors to this volume know that evidence from studies in various countries points incontrovertibly to the long-term societal benefits of good care and early educational provision. In countless parts of the world, the arguments now are not WHETHER there should be such institutions but HOW BEST they should be constituted and how their staff may best be trained.

Strangely, there are still those who hanker after 'market forces' solutions, or who hope to turn the clock back and see again some (mythical) Victorian mother devoted to the upbringing of her thirteen children! But the debate has changed fundamentally. Children ARE social constructs in part, and their childhood is too precious and too important for our future survival for it to be left to casual decision, chance encounter, or local profit-making organisations.

In this, the second of our books on early childhood education, we attempt to take the debate forward. We know that many countries are already now ahead of England. We know, for instance, that others have tried 'voucher systems' and found them leaving much to be desired. We know too, that many countries are debating how best to ensure high quality provision and how to assay it. We know that many are wrestling with questions of how best to embed the training and status of early years personnel more securely in appropriate professional development, or in institutions which enhance imagination and purpose. Many countries are concerned with multi-professional teams, recognising that the seamless coat of care and education needs different skills and different emphases at different times if the 'garment' is to prove useful for a lifetime.

We know that all children learn from the moment they are born. They learn desirable and undesirable things - often with equal facility. By the age of five or six they will have acquired the dominant features of the knowledge and attitudes that will last them for life. Mindful of the old Jesuit adage, *'Give me the child until he is seven ...'*, we recognise that much of our basic value system, our self-esteem, our locus of control, our views of responsibility will be largely in place by the time our children attend elementary or primary school. This alone should serve to remind us how fundamental it is for individual and societal well-being that we GET IT RIGHT. We are concerned with the way forward, with children's life-chances, with the nature and quality of our culture. We should also remind ourselves that, whilst parents are partners - and have vital and inalienable rights - it is the child who is the 'client', our future, our hope, not the parent.

Much evidence from the USA points to high quality childhood provision being more dependent upon high quality professional practice than upon any other single environmental circumstance (Saracho and Spodek, 1992).

Here, then, is a book from both sides of the Atlantic which looks at the ways forward. It draws upon comparative experience distinctly broader than that of North America and the UK. It is consistent in its message. There is much to be gained from taking the debate away from the sterile 'should we, shouldn't we' of politicians and into the arena of making it better. To paraphrase Lillian de Lissa (1939), that pioneer of early childhood education from Australia, we must *'build with vision and courage on the foundation already laid'*. We know what needs to be done. Let's do it!

Philip Gammage and Janet Meighan

Expanding combined nursery provision: bridging the gap between care and education

by Iram Siraj-Blatchford

Introduction

> *"While in the past some countries (e.g. the USA) have made very clear distinctions between the functions of care and education, this is now changing. Care and education should be integrated. Good teachers (educators) both care for, and care about the children in their charge. Similarly, good parents understand that caring for a child involves the encouragement of early learning. The 'seamless web' linking education and care is a key feature of best practice. This principle has some important consequences for the organisation, responsibility and training of staff for early learning, and its links with the home (on the one hand) and the primary school (on the other hand)."*
>
> (Ball, 1994, p 28)

The report, *Start Right: the importance of early learning*, was the outcome of the work of a non-government advisory committee, set up by the Royal Society for the Arts and directed by Sir Christopher Ball and Professor Kathy Sylva. This independent report recommended,among other things, the development and increase of combined or integrated provision for all children aged three and four whose parents wanted it.

In fact this is the third major report in recent years on early childhood education and care which has made this recommendation. In 1989, the House of Commons Education Select Committee (chaired by Timothy Raison, Conservative MP) on *Educational Provision for the Under-Fives* (HMSO, 1989) and the report which followed soon after, *Starting with Quality: Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Educational Experiences Offered to Three and Four-Year-Olds* (DES, 1990), (chaired by Angela Rumbold, Conservative MP) made similar recommendations, about the need for increased combined provision as the best way forward to meet the needs of today's families and children.

In spite of these recommendations the major political parties and many of those working in social services or educational early years settings remain largely unaware of the work of combined nursery centres. If combined provision is as desirable as the above reports suggest, then why is this ignorance so prevalent? There are two main reasons. Firstly, there are only a few combined nursery centres in the whole country, the National Association of Nursery Centres estimates, from their membership, that there are approximately 50-70 such centres. Neither the UK Department for Education nor the UK Department for Health and Social Services keep the records required to establish the precise number. Secondly, this kind of provision has been seen as expensive, as family support is provided, and these centres usually cater for the age groups below three years as well as the three-and-four year olds provided for in alternative pre-school settings.

In this chapter I want to establish the holistic nature of combined provision, what it entails and how it can meet the needs of children and families. I want to explore this in the current context of, what I consider, the disorder and disarray of early childhood services; what some refer to as 'diversity and choice'. In terms of policy I am particularly interested in the role of the state sector. This chapter will also raise issues around a loose and flexible framework for the kind of quality issues which are important to combined provision. Some references will also be made to some of the main tensions which can exist in current combined provision as it stands.

Diversity and choice or disorder and disarray?

Sheila Lawlor, a well known adviser to the Conservative Government and a member of the right-wing Adam Smith Institute, argued from selectively chosen references in her pamphlet, *Nursery Matters* (1995), that diversity in 'nursery' provision is the best way forward for the expansion of early child care and education services. Lawlor is of the opinion that there are only two major voices in the call for reform in increased provision of early years services. On the one hand there are those who want to see the continued expansion of diversity in provision with an increase in 'choice' for parents, which she argues can be achieved through a vouchers system, something I will come to later. On the other hand, Lawlor recognises that there are those who would wish for a more interventionist and co-ordinated provision, and an increase in the services provided by the Government. Lawlor herself favours the former and asserts

that early child care and education can only improve and expand under a free-market philosophy where parents are recognised as consumers and clients. The latter voices are dubbed by Lawlor as the 'nanny-statists', those who would wish to take power out of the hands of the ordinary parent and put it in the hands of local government, an area which has already been made almost entirely impotent under the last sixteen years of Conservative Rule.

The current reality is that children under the age of five can be found in a wide range of early childhood services, and one could argue that this sector has always been in a free-market situation. Their situation should, perhaps, serve as a warning for other sectors/institutions contemplating competition in a 'free' market (e.g. schools who opt-out of local authority control!). The many forms that early years provision take include: day care, a service catering mainly for the under-fours and provided by local authority day nurseries/family centres, childminders and private day or workplace nurseries. There are other types of family centres, a large number of playgroups and the combined nursery centres all of which provide a service for under-five-year-olds. There are also local education authority and private nursery classes and schools, as well as a very large number of four-year-olds in infant school classes. The following comment in the Guardian newspaper, made by the journalist Peter Kingston, is not uncommon *"The jumbled world of early learning and care...contained 35 categories of provider at the last count..."* (p.2, Guardian Education, 27.6.1995).

Services for children under five in the UK are thus, not surprisingly, characterised by a serious lack of co-ordination, too much diversity and paucity of provision and differences of provision in geographical location. This all leads to a severe lack of choice and availability of any particular service for parents to choose from. Lawlor (1995) appears to be totally unaware of the ad hoc development of early child care and education, or if she is aware of it, she appears to be happy that it should continue in this way. 'Diversity and choice' is promoted as a sensible 'common sense' policy, and yet, far from being sensible, such policies will actually exacerbate the very problems that Lawlor asserts would be solved. Of course, many would beg to differ with her views on a number of other counts too.

Gillian Pugh, Director of the Early Childhood Unit at the UK National Children's Bureau, and a long term campaigner for the rights of families and young children to a co-ordinated, effective, flexible and integrated service, has

written extensively on the key issues for debate. Many of these issues can be identified deeply within the historical development of services run by the many different providers - education, social services, health authorities and voluntary and private groups and individuals. Historically, the many different services that have been mentioned above have been administered by different government departments, agencies and interest groups. These have been departments and interest groups that have held different aims and goals. This, in turn, has resulted in the development of settings that have different admissions criteria and hours of opening, that set fees at very different levels and that are staffed by people (largely women) with different training, who are on different levels of pay and enjoy different conditions of service (Pugh, 1988, 1990, 1992, Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford & Johnson, 1992, Ball, 1995).

The current UK Government has now committed itself to a £730 million voucher scheme to give purchasing power to parents. This is a direct response to the Prime Minister's statement that the Conservatives would pledge to provide a 'nursery' place for all four-year-olds. Unfortunately it has now become clear that the Prime Minister did not actually understand what exactly constitutes a 'nursery' place. It is now apparent that he was also assuming that four-year-olds in reception classes of up to 30 children in primary schools were also being provided with a 'nursery' education. On July 12 1995 the British Association for Early Childhood Education wrote to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, Gillian Shephard and cautioned that,

> *"Undoubtedly such a scheme (of vouchers) would give 'purchasing power' to* ***some*** *parents, but it will not make Nursery Education available to those families on low incomes. Vouchers will help those who already pay fees for private school provision of Nursery fees."*

The letter goes on to argue that the voucher system will not result in any expansion of good quality provision, and that due to the loose inspection standards, standards of provision and service will fall dramatically having a knock on effect to school achievement.

Worst of all the vouchers will not provide families with the choice that they are promised if the provision they wish for is simply unavailable. Again the hardest hit will be those children in State provision who are often there because they are identified as having a special 'need' for care and education (see, Children Act, DES, 1989). Where a service is more expensive, as in the case

of combined nursery centres, there is more reason for concern over who will be able to use the service. A voucher is worth approximately £1,100 per child, per annum, whereas a state nursery place can cost public funds more than £3,000 (although most cost less). By contrast a voluntary sector playgroup place can cost as little as £13 a year to the public purse. The latter being based on poorly trained staff who are often expected to pay for their own training and rely on virtually free labour from mothers. This is not to suggest that playgroups can not achieve quality care and education, some do *despite* the constraints, and some mothers might already hold training qualifications in teaching, nursing etc. which they can draw on for expertise. This is not the point, what is at issue are the options for provision on a wide scale, nationally.

Many mothers are happy to work voluntarily but the exploitation of female labour in the field of early child care and education is also an issue which requires deeper exploration and analysis. This is an issue that requires more space than allowed for in this chapter. It is also sobering to make the comparison between those, often uncritically accepted, costs to the public purse, that relate to non-statutory post-sixteen education. Costs of £3,000 and above are commonplace for A-levels students. Should we accept that the education and care of three and four-year-olds is 'worth' less than seventeen and eighteen-year-olds? Would we accept an education for these older children engaged in non-statutory post-sixteen education that cost £13, that was run by volunteers for short periods of time in very varying conditions across the country?

Under a Government where committees and experts have concluded that we need to **expand** integrated and combined provision (DES, 1990; HMSO, 1989), the voucher system is not a sensible policy, even allowing their own arguments. In terms of administration alone it is a flawed policy, the costs would be prohibitive. So the disputes over future policy for early child care and education are set to continue, in the UK we are still in the very early phase of the voucher system which is only currently geared to cater for provision for four-year-olds. Provision for 0-3-year-olds has been completely ignored. The main expansion of early child care and education has been in the private sector, and this trend looks set to continue. European comparisons of children aged three-to-five attending publicly funded services shows the UK lagging behind countries like Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain and Sweden (Pugh, 1992; Ball, 1994), while these and other countries continue to

improve their provision and training, we are still battling with the cost-effectiveness arguments.

Those involved in early child care and education have been, and continue to be, a close-knit community, and all would argue to sharing an important emotional and intellectual commitment to young children and their families. However, it would be unwise to play down the tensions, and the differences in claims to quality and the levels of appropriate funding required, which have existed between the various factions in recent years. This is an issue which I shall turn to next while making one case for improving and expanding combined nursery provision. But it is also vital to mention here that these tensions have also created positive outcomes, for the first time in the UK there is an organisation which represents a national voice for early child care and education. The Early Childhood Education Forum (ECEF) has now been established by the majority of groups representing early childhood care and education. ECEF emerged in response to a plethora of national Government policies which affected the early years in important areas including the curriculum, training, and vouchers, the demands of the Children Act (1989) and the Education Reform Act (1988).

Inequality in diversity - winners and losers

I want to argue in this section that there is currently insufficient provision, and that the current diversity actually disadvantages those children who have the greatest needs. Demand for child care and education far outstrips the current supply. This has resulted in a lack of real choice for parents and unequal benefits to children. Particular services are framed within distinctive discourses which favour specific inputs and emphases, this in turn can create 'winners and losers' in terms of outcomes. Some research evidence has suggested that different services cater for different children. Osborn & Milbank (1987), for example, showed that independent and voluntary provision was more likely to be used by parents of socially advantaged children while children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds were over-represented in day nurseries and nursery schools. However, there is growing evidence that more rural communities in particular are suffering from a lack of appropriate child care (Statham, 1995).

Even within the state sector of day nurseries and nursery classes important differences have been identified. Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford & Johnson (1992)

explain that day nurseries can provide whole day care and are administered and staffed by **social services** workers. They normally have a two year training with the primary emphasis being on young children's social and emotional development. These nurseries do not normally employ teachers. By contrast, **education sector** nursery classes/schools are administered and staffed by education workers with a four year graduate teaching qualification; they are supported by nursery officers with a two year training. The primary emphasis here is on young children learning through a quality curriculum. Sylva et al. showed that children attending day nurseries, where the most 'needy' children are over-represented, did not have access to a sufficiently well-thought out or high quality curriculum. Clearly, this would be difficult in a service focusing largely on 'care'. However, it is also very worrying given that many of the groups disproportionately represented in these centres (working class, ethnic minority, poor etc.) are later identified in the school system as underachieving.

Sadly, the number of young children living in families suffering from relative poverty has grown dramatically in the last fifteen years. During the same period researchers (Clark, 1988) and other educationalists have emphasised the importance of these children being exposed to stimulating activity based experiences. At the same time the four year training of teachers has undergone Government reform which has seen the shortening of courses and the demise of important training components such as child development and courses on social factors which influence learning (see Siraj-Blatchford, J. & Siraj-Blatchford, I., 1995).

It therefore seems that we have arrived at a situation where some education nurseries might not be providing enough of the 'care' component, while some day nurseries do not provide a sufficiently educational curriculum. Clearly this makes no sense from the child's perspective where care and education should be inseparable. The historical development of these services has created an inequality of provision that clearly requires urgent attention. A voucher system will not alleviate present shortcomings in such a complex system; particular providers in each sector will now strive to defend their own form of provision and position. What is needed is a radical rethink of what is needed, based on the needs of young children and the wishes of parents. This can only be achieved if parents have access to more information about early childhood services, which currently, they do not. There is currently no single source of information and advice for parents nor is there sufficient co-ordination between local and national services to provide planning, delivery and support of the

service. Training continues to be demarked between education and care and we are still in a situation where some providers have hardly any training resources at all.

The development of combined nursery centres, the first of which was set up almost twenty five years ago, was aimed at providing a more flexible and integrated service to children **and** parents. The aim was to draw together the advantages of combining care and education under one, integrated system. This has been a system funded by both local authority education and social services departments. The centres have aimed to provide the greatest continuity of experience for children from 0-5 years between home and school. The involvement of parents has thus been seen as a vital part of the service. Given a genuine freedom to choose, and given the information upon which to make that choice, parents would undoubtedly prefer this option.

The centres are normally administered by local education departments and some of the problems associated with the differences in the conditions of service and responsibilities of the education and care staff have caused difficulties. These difficulties should not be exaggerated, in an early study of such centres these difficulties were also found to be reflected in other services and are not confined solely to combined nursery centres (Ferri et al. 1981). However, the nature of these centres has brought into focus some of the problems which exist in the wider context, and perhaps that is why we only have seventy or so such centres. Having made this point it is also worth mentioning that a number of these centres are widely recognised as 'centres of excellence' from within the early years community and that they are visited regularly by early childhood educators both from within the UK and overseas (e.g. Penn Green Nursery Centre in Corby and Hillfields Nursery Centre in Coventry).

The benefits that combined nursery centres have to offer is substantial and it is reflected in the integrated, holistic approach they adopt. In spite of some of the externally imposed organisational problems, combined provision has been shown to provide a flexible service responsive to local needs (Murphy, 1989; Yates, 1991). In particular, combined centres can offer:

- care and education to children regardless of priority or 'need';
- no separation of the children with the greatest social difficulties;

- support and education for parents within the local community;
- a service for children **within** the family ecology;
- a service to children from as young as a few months to school age;
- the skills and expertise of teachers and nursery officers;
- flexible hours to suit the needs of parents and children;
- a combination of the training strengths and expertise from education (e.g. on the curriculum) and from the social services (e.g. child protection, Children Act etc.);
- a service responsive to the need for continuity of care and learning between the home and school for under-fives.

Combined nursery centres offer all of these advantages over other forms of provision. In education nurseries for instance, there is a dominant discourse which gives priority to individualism, individual progress and achievement. This is sometimes pursued without enough regard to the role of parents and families or for the importance of continuity in learning **and** care between home and school. While, in recent years, we have seen the development of early literacy (e.g. Hannon, Weinberger & Nutbrown, 1991) and numeracy programmes aimed at promoting learning within the home and creating greater partnership with parents, this has been aimed at developing the individual child rather than providing any systematic support or education for their parents. In contrast combined nursery centres work within a discourse of the child as a member of a wider context of family and community. They aim to be responsive to the young child in terms of; education and care; community and service; carers and children within families and teachers and the nursery officers expertise. In terms of future developments, the kind of flexibility that combined nursery centres offer should be attractive to parents (Holtermann, 1992).

The National Association of Nursery Centres (NANC) which is the national body representing a network of support for combined centres and those interested in their work (address supplied at the end of the chapter) aims:

> *" to promote high quality, fully integrated care and education in partnership with parents and carers. The Association believes in the value of working as multi-disciplinary teams co-ordinating qualifications, experience and skills."*
>
> (NANC, 1994)

Given that the centres function in an unco-ordinated system, their success in achieving the above aims often depends on the extent to which the centres are part of a local authority's general policy on under-fives. They also need to adopt single systems and policies for accountability in areas such as curriculum, record keeping and assessment.

There is a desperate need for further research into the effectiveness of combined provision and how it could be improved further. Currently, such provision is only available in urban and relatively poor areas; the consequences of any expansion would need to take into account the implications for a wider set of community contexts. Given what has been already been said about what combined nursery centres are capable of offering, and the changing needs of families, an expansion in this type of provision is important. Families are under greater stress in both urban and rural areas and the increase in poverty has meant that over four million young children in the UK today live in poverty stricken households (Kumar, 1993). More than one in three children is now in a single parent household. Wherever nursery centres are, the issue of quality is vital, and quality can vary in any service. Some of the following issues therefore need to be considered in order to provide a quality service, and indeed, an equality service.

Issues of quality in integrated provision

The whole notion of what constitutes quality in early childhood services is a contested one and the debates continue. Given the constrains of this chapter, we clearly cannot engage with these debates in any depth. The following references will, however, be helpful to readers anxious to understand some of the current trends and tensions: Harms & Clifford, 1980; Clark, 1988; Children Act, 1989; European Commission Childcare Network, 1990; Elfer & Wedge, 1992; Moss & Pence, 1995. From my own engagement in this debate, I have come to believe that the following quality principles that can be found in good combined provision, should be considered in any future expansion of

combined provision. All of the centres which I have contact with are striving to reach their full potential in these areas and many of them have coming close to achieving it.

Equal opportunities - these encompass a positive approach to 'race', gender, class, dis/ability, age and any other special or particular difference among children or adults (both staff and parents). Evidence of this can be seen in the practice and development of policies, resources, environment and staff planning and action. Paper statements are not enough, there should be clearly visible, structural, cultural and interpersonal equal opportunities practices in evidence daily. For instance, evidence of achievement can be reflected in the staff composition, the resources used and in the daily interactions and planning with, and for, children and parents (see Siraj-Blatchford, 1994).

Family and community - this means much more than the rhetoric or slogan 'parents in partnership' suggests! Family and community involvement is a vital part of good practice for many centres (among other centres doing an excellent job in this respect the Penn Green Centre in Corby has become world famous for it!). Many centres aim to provide parent 'empowerment' by increasing parent confidence in themselves and in their parenting and 'teaching' skills. After a self-awareness course held by staff for parents at the Hillfields Nursery Centre all of the parents who took part reported benefits in confidence. This was also evident in the parents increased involvement in the Centre and for some, their advancement to further and higher education. At the Camrose Nursery Centre in Northampton the parent-friendly ethos has encouraged parents to set up their own support networks for discussions over weekly lunches, keep-fit classes and special educational events for small groups of children (e.g. nature trails).

The examples are endless, but again the evidence should be not only upon policies but also upon daily practices, particularly those which support parents in parenting skills and those which involve parents in the governance and decision-making procedures. These may be related to the curriculum, inspections, behaviour policies etc. The very good sign of good practice where centres have created a respectful, power-sharing ethos is where parents **themselves** come forward with innovative ideas and the questions which matter to them. Centres need to reflect upon and respond to the struggles within the local community. So that, for example, if racist attacks occur, they have a role

in providing information for parents on their rights and on where they can go for further support.

It needs to be remembered that the staff and the children are also a vital part of a centre's community. Centres should, however, be primarily geared towards the care and education of the child and it should be recognised that adults who feel valued and supported will provide a better environment for children.

Primary educators - Rouse & Griffin (1992) argue that smaller children need intimate relationships with a significant, responsive adult. Centres can strengthen and support children's development and learning by establishing a day-to-day, one-to-one link for parents and children. This can be with a particular educator who is responsible for monitoring the quality of care and education a child receives. Primary educators should have a key responsibility to liaise with the parent/carer, to collate records of the child's development and to act as a significant reference point for information on the child and her family. This will be especially important where, for instance, if a child protection issue arose or the need for home visiting.

Interactions - the quality of these are of the utmost importance to both children's development and to the trust that parents will develop in a centre staff. Much has been written from an education perspective about the quality of child-to-child interaction and about adult-child interaction. Less has been written about the value of adult-adult interaction, be it with parents or with other staff. Centres are busy places and unless this area of quality is well planned for and regularly monitored it can easily become intuitively exercised by some rather than carefully applied by all.

Curriculum - having teachers on the staff certainly helps in this area and they are usually the ones who take a leadership role in planning the curriculum programmes and for supporting staff in developing learning activities. An awareness of the way that children have learnt at home through their 'natural curriculum' is vital, as is a strong understanding of the kind of curriculum children are likely to face in their reception year in school. All centre staff should contribute towards providing an essential continuity between home, the centre and the school. It is also essential that staff understand the role of play in children's development and of the role of adults in facilitating play which develops children's social, emotional, cognitive, physical and creative aptitudes.

Assessment - no sensible curriculum is possible without careful observation, assessment and record keeping. Children's knowledge, concepts, attitudes, skills and feelings must be taken into account here and educators can learn about these through careful observation and regular discussion about the observations, these in turn will help to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum on offer. Assessment also includes the monitoring and development of the centre as a whole, relationships with parents, and staff development.

Staff development - combined nursery centres have been fortunate in being able to borrow from the best of social services and educational provision in this respect. Most centres offer their staff regular 'supervision' and support sessions, and one-to-one discussion of an individual's progress. In terms of training, centres usually have access to educational in-service (INSET) training on curriculum, assessment and reporting to parents. Social services can also provide centre staff with training on issues of child protection, home liaison and the care of under-threes. Of course there is much more to training, and because of the many agencies centres work with, they often build up good relations with health visitors, social workers, speech therapists and others. In every case, these help in developing staff's awareness of important areas to both children and their parents.

Environment - the quality of the building, outdoor environment, the play/education resources, the availability of free snacks and meals and the expertise of staff all contribute to quality. Parents are also, like staff, concerned about health and safety issues; with very young children attending the centres most of them need a laundry service and safe equipment for children to play with. Many centre heads have become innovative, creative entrepreneurs, raising money from local industry, community and charities to develop their work and to improve the quality of the environment. Many centres also act as a locus and focus of activity for others involved in child care or education. Childminders, nannies, early years special education peripatetic teams, mothers' groups among others have all been known to use combined nursery centres.

Multi-disciplinary expertise - most centres are committed to the development of a multi-professional team rather than the promotion of multi-professional people. Each person thus has special responsibilities related to their area of expertise. In fact it would be unrealistic and naive to expect any

educator/worker to be expert at all the roles that centres have demands for. Economically, and in terms of time and resources, the recognition and utilisation of comparative advantage is seen as a sensible policy. While all staff receive both care, health and education INSET training, their initial training is also valued.

Management matters - centres require a unique form of management, and perhaps that's why so many centre managers show a flair for creativity and innovation. Managing a multi-professional team and attending to the variety of support services involved as well as the children and parents can be very demanding. One of the centres I know has a staff of over thirty working flexi-time, and over two hundred and fifty children on roll. Most centres are open fifty weeks of the year. This is very different to a nursery class with 46 part-time children, a teacher, and one nursery officer, or to a day care centre with nursery officers and children. The nearest form of comparable management would probably be the community school. Most managers have little training for their role, but the nature of the work usually leads managers to adopt styles which are more democratic than hierarchical and which focus on good communication skills.

Of course there is much more to quality in combined nursery centres than has been mentioned in this chapter. If the child is at the heart of the learning and development process, with the recognition that families are an integral part of this, and that families are also in need of support, then surely any future nursery expansion must consider services that take the parents role seriously and invest in them as one important way forward.

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Notes:

1. Thanks are due to Sheila Thorpe and Bernadette Duffy, both Heads of combined nursery centres, for letting me learn from them, their centres and from the NANC.

2. I am indebted and grateful to Dorothy Rouse Selleck and Brenda Griffin for talking through and helping me compile the outline of these quality principles in the section on quality in combined nursery centres. The version presented here is, however, the sole responsibility of the author.

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Developing appropriate home - school partnerships

by Jennifer Little and Janet Meighan

"Partnership requires a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect, and the willingness to negotiate."

(Lochrie et al., 1993, p 1)

The importance of parents and teachers working together to ensure the best possible educational opportunities and experiences for children, is now more widely recognised. There exists, however, considerable diversity in the nature of these relationships. The term 'partnership' is frequently mis-used to describe a range of involvements without defining the key issue of **shared responsibility** upon which relationships are based if they to be seen as mutual partnerships. Thus, seeing parents as 'assistants for teachers' is misrepresented as partnership.

The collaboration of parents and teachers, based on the need to promote the positive development of children, provides a common basis for action. Meaningful partnerships arise out of mutual respect and joint experiences where both teachers and parents share in the planning, decision making and evaluation. This chapter will examine various historical, social and international influences affecting the development of such partnerships and appraise the critical nature of parents' initial involvement as their children's first teachers. In addition, it will review the relationship between children's progress in school and the continuing involvement of parents in a partnership with schools. Finally, it will point to ways forward.

Changes in parent-teacher relationships: a historical framework

The changes in the nature of home-school relationships in the last century have been based on varied assumptions of parental roles in the education of their children. The introduction of mass schooling in the 1800s brought with it a transfer of responsibility away from parents to schools. Before this period of compulsory schooling, education for the masses at home had been based on acquiring the skills of the family, such as farming, spinning, weaving, and

baking. Most parents lacked any systematic, book-based education and this, together with the limited nature of home environments, particularly in terms of basic literacy, led them to feel inadequate in contributing to their children's formal education. This was not helped by the stance of teachers in excluding parents from schools.

The limitations of a schooling system, based on a separation of home and school, became apparent. The poor, impoverished backgrounds of many children and the ignorance of parents contributed to the gulf between home and school. Efforts were made to **educate parents** to give them a greater understanding of their children and to influence their attitudes to school. Margaret McMillan in pioneering the open-air nursery school established in Deptford in 1914, was convinced that schools could not have much success when children were dirty, hungry and disease ridden. She attempted to deal with the consequences of poverty by working with families to overcome their ignorance. 'Partnership', however, did not enter into her work; she took on the 'total expert role' of dictating what was best.

In the 1930s, Susan Isaacs, convinced of the critical influence parents had on their children's development, concerned herself with educating and assisting them in providing the best possible environment for their children. She wrote a series of pamphlets, *Concerning Children*, that were intended to give parents a better understanding of child development. Her attempts at parents' education involved developing their confidence and reducing their anxiety, in order to instil in them a belief in their own prowess as parents. Even earlier, in the 1800s, Pestalozzi and Froebel, recognising that education began at birth - the parents being the first educators - sought to enhance the early experiences of the home in their own schools. Froebel encouraged mothers to observe and participate in the games and activities in his kindergarten so they could watch the teachers and use their methods.

Partly inspired by the work of these pioneers and partly by the findings of research studies, confirmed in the Plowden Report, (CACE, 1967), that indicated that there was a significant association between parental interest and encouragement of their children and their school achievements, the 60s and 70s saw many initiatives intended to break down the barriers between home and school, to foster parents' confidence and understanding in their relationships with schools. This was a period when **parents' involvement** in primary schools was highlighted. Cities such as Liverpool and Coventry set out information stalls in shops and large stores in their efforts to reach parents

and stimulate interest in education. Schools started to open their doors to parents, providing them with information, encouraging them to visit, attend meetings, fundraise, help in classrooms, talk about their work and hobbies, and accompany children on school visits. The nature of their participation, however, was **dictated by the teachers**, and in some situations continued to be very limited as there was a muted professional intention to involve parents. Teachers, however, became increasingly aware that parents could provide them with crucial information about their children; data that would benefit the learning/ teaching situation. The Plowden Report (op cit., p.30) gave support to the development of more viable partnerships.

> *"Teachers are linked to parents by their children for whom they are both responsible. The triangle should be completed and a more direct relationship established between teachers and parents. They should be partners in more than name, their responsibility become joint..."*

As part of this process home visits and meetings between parents and teachers were recommended to establish relationships and further the understanding of both parties.

Wolfendale (1992) identified the most common examples of parent involvement in schools which gradually emerged over recent decades:

- **Parents assisting either in the classroom or elsewhere in the school.** Generally, in this capacity, parents read with children, help out in other curriculum areas or assist with preparation of materials.
- **Communication links between home and school** which keep both teachers and parents informed. These usually involve written communication from either parents or teachers, newsletters, home visits, parent/school councils, parent/teacher interviews.
- **Parents involved in assessment,** particularly when a child has special educational needs. Regular home-school consultations to monitor progress and plan future programmes.
- **Parents involved as school governors.**
- **Participation in local and national interests groups** which link with schools (eg. CASE, Campaign for the Advancement of State Education).
- **Parents involved as teachers in the home,** participating in home reading programmes and assisting with projects.

The 1980s saw numerous initiatives by schools to involve parents in their children's reading, as **'learning coaches'**, despite limited encouragement from official sources. HMI reports (e.g. *Education 5 to 9*, DES, 1982) whilst endorsing parents' interest in reading by encouraging looking at books, reading stories to their children and recommending that children borrowed school books to take home, did not suggest an explicit role for parents in hearing children read at home. The initiatives launched by schools, however, offered various forms of participation for parents covering both school-focused and home-focused involvement. Whilst the approaches adopted in the various initiatives varied, all attempted to change home-school relationships by advocating a 'learning coach' role for parents and in some cases families. The Haringey and Belfield Reading Projects developed an open approach to parents participation by encouraging parents to hear their children read books sent home by the schools with teachers giving only general advice. Other projects, such as paired reading, were more prescriptive with teachers providing specific recommendations to parents on the support they gave to their children. Hannon's (1995) comprehensive survey of evidence resulting from many of these initiatives, reflects both the acceptance of the parents' role as **educators** and the recognition of a closer partnership with teachers in collaborating with a mutual goal. Hannon (p.150) concludes,

> *"It is now almost inconceivable that there could be a return to school-centred views of literacy as something children only learn as a result of being taught in school, of parents as marginal or even harmful in children's literacy development or of direct parental involvement in the teaching process as impracticable and undesirable. We have learned that much literacy - perhaps most - is learned at home, that parents or other family members are central to children's development, that parental exclusion is unjustifiable, and involvement is feasible, rewarding, and can help meet the goals of schools and families."*

Parents as educators

> *"Early education experience begins in the home and the quality of that experience is vital."* (Chazan and Laing, 1982, p.31)

The recognition of the importance of the parental role in the education of their children is not a phenomenon of the 20th century, but has long been recognised

with Puritan writers Robinson and Abbott stressing the importance of the family influence in building a foundation for learning. More recently, psychologists' estimates of substantial intellectual development by age 4 lend credence to Charles Darwin's comment, that the first 3 years of children's lives are the 3 years in which they learn most.

Parents and family are inextricably linked with young children's efforts to walk, talk and interact with their environment. Differing parental contributions inevitably affect the extent of children's learning. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1990, p.22) comments that

> *"Children who come to school with a history of rich experiences...have a rich background of first-hand experiences upon which later learning can be based."*

Although changes have occurred over the years in the understanding of language and how it develops in young children, language experience in infancy is critical from any perspective and no one has disputed the important contributions parents make to this development. Learning one's first language entails much more than simply learning grammar and vocabulary. Chomsky's extensive study into language acquisition has concentrated on the construction of the explicit grammar of language. Although he considers every child to have an innate faculty for language that is genetically predetermined, he suggests that experience must be converted into knowledge of a particular language (Chomsky, 1986). It is the interaction of experience with the genetic predisposition to language acquisition that creates meaning.

Wells echoes this idea and states that research over the last few decades has made clear that " *Human infants are born with a drive to make sense of their experience and with certain effective strategies for doing so*" (Wells, 1991, p.33). Central to the optimal development of language is the construction of meaning that results from the collaboration between communication and experience "*in which the words and sentences both refer to the shared situation and reflect a particular orientation to it* " (Wells, 1985, p.102). It is through the shared experiences of children and their families, and the language that is used in such settings, that young children are able to gain meaning of the words they hear and increasingly use.

Once the linguistic system is in place and a child has acquired a basic vocabulary of several thousand words, experience becomes the springboard of

meaning. Children need continual opportunities to interact with words, phrases and sentences and to practice them in meaningful contexts. In this process it is the **adults** who need to make *"the effort to understand the child's intended meaning and extent it in terms the child can understand"* (Wells, 1991, p.17). As meaning develops in the course of a child's experiences, in response to vocalisations, intonations and reactions to actions, it is the parents' role to talk to their children and help them, not only to find words to express needs, feelings and experiences so that they can communicate with others, but to respond in turn to what others are communicating to them. It is during the early years of life within the familiar circle of the family, that a child finds such opportunities to use language to explore, construct and communicate ideas.

Recent decades have seen a growth, particularly in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand of parents who choose to educate their children at home beyond the start of the age for schooling. These are not the wealthy who have always used their wealth to provide home-tutors if they so chose, but a cross-section of society, with a particular concentration of families at the upper working class and lower middle class levels. The nine common reasons given by the families for choosing home-based education are variations on the same underlying motive - that school is not working, or not likely to work for their children. Studies from a number of countries have found that whilst the motives and methods of home educating families may differ, their success rates are increasingly undisputed, and research on home-based education effectiveness (Meighan,1994) confirms a growing acceptance of the view of parents as educators.

Many families when interviewed, however, explain that they would prefer to work in co-operation with teachers, on a flexi-time basis, sharing resources and participating in joint activities. In 'Home Schooling - Parents as Educators', Mayberry, et al. (1995), point to examples of public schools in California enrolling home-educated children for Independent Study Programs (ISP), and in San Diego co-operation between parent educators and schools has resulted in the development of Community Home Education Programs. These enable home-educating families to have access to such things as text books and curriculum guides, hands-on science experiences and computer laboratories staffed by teachers. In addition, a bimonthly newsletter providing information on services is circulated, and field trips and meetings for parents are organised.

These initiatives arising out of home-based education illustrate that parent educators and teachers are able to co-operate successfully, and provide valuable

indicators for the development of viable parent-teacher partnerships and could be seen as one of the forces of change in these relationships.

Forces of change in home-school relations

Underlying the initiatives to bring about change in the nature of parent-teacher interactions, for the benefit of the children, are the many forces bringing about changes in society, including:

- **The partial success of schools in producing a generation of more literate parents.** For example in the 1870s few parents could read, whereas in the1990s most can.
- **The information rich nature of the home environment due in part to the communications technological explosion.** Thus most homes have radio, TV and may have video, computer, telephone, and hi-fi sound system.
- **The more accessible forms of up-to-date information.** There has been a prolific growth of specialist magazines, ranging from cookery to computers, and the very latest information is communicated by radio and TV programmes.
- **The changing nature of parenthood.** Divorce has become widespread and there has been a rapid growth of single parent families, partly because Britain has the largest percentage of teenage pregnancies in Europe; the effects of these trends are somewhat variable, sometimes leading to the dependency of some parents on teachers for support, and sometimes to closer co-operation. In addition, the gradual disappearance of extended families has resulted in a reduction in the scope and variety of children's relationships.
- **The effects of migration on the continuity of children's learning experiences.** The opening of borders in Europe and the search for employment opportunities has encouraged greater mobility, resulting in less stability.
- **Changing employment patterns.** The growth in part-time employment, redundancy, high unemployment and early retirement caused by the collapse of work has created opportunities for more parents and grandparents to take an active role in children's education.
- **Policy developments in equal opportunities.** The women's liberation movement and more widespread use of birth control have influenced more women to pursue careers and interests outside the home.

- **Government legislation and its effects.** This has raised the expectations of parents regarding their greater voice and power in education, e.g. the alliance of governors and parents in opposing education cuts in the Spring of 1995.
- **Opportunities for parent education.** Some parents take on the role of learners participating in workshops, courses and conferences which encourages their self-esteem and readiness for a partnership role.

Many of these forces continue to influence the relationships between home and school and bring about changes in attitudes and expectations on the part of both parents and teachers.

Differing parental and teacher roles affecting partnership

In the hundred years that have past since the introduction of mass schooling, when the view of parental exclusion and of education left solely in the hands of the professionals prevailed, the rate of change in how parents and teachers view their respective roles in the education of children has been slow. This is in spite of an evolving education system and changes occurring in society. Many parents are still happy to leave it to the professionals and, likewise, many teachers have not moved very far towards working closely with parents. The concern amongst teachers to establish a professional identity is at times in variance with accepting a partnership role with parents.

Even in the area of early childhood education, where most change has occurred, not all parents are ready to accept the role of partner with teachers in the education of their children. Meighan (1989) identified a range of definitions of the varying roles of parents, including parents as problems, as pre-school educators, as para-professional assistants and as partners, which can be seen as a series of 'staging posts' along a continuum. The task, then, is how to support parents moving towards a partnership role. For example, parents who are facing challenges in their own lives and require support in developing their self- esteem, together with their understanding regarding their children's education, may move towards becoming voluntary assistants in schools at the invitation of teachers, before being in a position to even consider establishing a partnership role. Even so, they will continue to be the principal providers of the basics: love, nutrition, health care, freedom from abuse, and stimulation in language and experiences on which to base future learning, and also a vital source of information about their own children.

Traditionally, mothers have tended to be the active participants in their children's schooling, both in terms of interaction in the home and visiting and assisting in various invited roles in schools. With the changes in roles both within the family and in the world of work, it is evident that the contributions that fathers can make should be recognised, but one could argue that fathers in the 90s have become much more involved in the care and education of their children. Whilst this involvement may not yet be at a level equal to that of traditional maternal involvement, it seems to be a step in the right direction. To this end, it is with both parents, where this applies in any given situation, that an effective home-school partnership should be established.

Following Government legislation in the 1980s which made schools more accountable to parents and gave them representation on governing bodies to participate in decision making and sharing of power, a limited number of parents now accept the role of governor of their children's school, taking responsibility for the shared decision making in the running of the school. This role, however, may be self-contained in itself, and parents will not necessarily have adopted a mutual partnership relationship with teachers.

The role of parents in respect of schools and education is defined in starkly contrasting ways in different countries and within different countries. Initiatives in Scandinavian countries, other European countries, the U.S.A. and Canada are encouraging serious and mutually constructive partnerships in which the parents' role involves them in taking an active part in developing learning and teaching processes jointly with teachers and children. Spain regards education in the early years as an experience to complement that of the family, and with this in mind, the Ministry of Education has ruled that *"Schools must share the task of education with the family"* (Odina, 19, p.105). As a result parents are involved not just in the activity of the school, but additionally have a democratic relationship of power sharing in the operation and management of the schools. Parents are seen as *"an integral part of the school and the link between the outside and inside of the institution"* (Odina, op.cit., p.105). Experiences within the Folkeskole in Denmark have provided further valuable models of democratic relationships between parents and teachers and continue to do so.

> *"New models of communal planning and the evaluation of teaching in connection with individual classes are to be tried out."*
>
> (Jensen, et al., *1992*)

Teachers also exhibit a repertoire of roles (Meighan, 1988) which fall into two groups, authoritarian and non-authoritarian. A non-authoritarian, co-operative, democratic role is one which can facilitate a flexible range of behaviour. A mutual partnership with parents which involves shared goals and decision making, allows for differing contributions. For example the partnership may benefit from the teachers' expertise, consultative and organisational skills, whilst recognising the distinct nature of parents' contributions. The current UK stress on authoritarian approaches in schools militates against such co-operation.

Hannon (op.cit.,p.48) in examining the deprofessionalization of the teaching of literacy, in line with new views about literacy development, points to the new positions for parents as the nature of their contribution is more widely recognised. Parents and families, however, may need teacher support to engage fully in the notion of the 'literacy club' as expounded by Smith in 'Joining the Literacy Club' (1988). The majority of teachers in the UK, as yet, have not experienced training to develop appropriate skills in supporting parents and developing partnerships, and therefore do not automatically see this as part of their professional role.

Research by Swick (1991) has indicated that when both teachers and parents possess certain attributes they are more able to establish meaningful partnerships. Some of these, such as warmth, a positive self-image, sensitivity are found to be positive influences in both parents and teachers. When parents enjoy harmonious relationships within their families, are open to the ideas of others, the collaboration has a flying start.

Teachers' attributes, such as flexibility, reliability and accessibility, together with effective teaching and management skills, appear to positively influence relationships with parents. On the occasions when parents need help in developing partnership skills, teachers need to provide a positive example by being supportive, dependable and responsive. Planning to involve parents, and on-going professional development are also cited by researchers as being highly related to successful partnerships.

Empowering parents to become continuing, active participants in their children's education, however, may instil in some teachers a fear of the power that they perceive parents may wield. It is essential that teachers' self-esteem, and their recognition of the value of working co-operatively for the benefit of

their pupils, enables them to overcome any tendency to adopt a defensive stance.

Home and school working in partnership

'It takes a whole village to educate a child.' (African saying)
In surveying the established and developing initiatives in the 1990s, it is possible to find many models in which appropriate, meaningful partnerships can flourish. Guidelines that have proved successful in many situations will provide a framework for schools as they establish a model of parent-teacher partnership based on their individual needs.

There have always existed more opportunities for dialogue between parents and teachers in nursery schools and classes than elsewhere in the school system. Whilst initially these arose out of parents delivering and collecting their young children, there now exists a wide range of possibilities for parents and teachers to work closely together. Parent and toddler groups, parent discussion groups, courses for parents, Parents' Centres attached to schools, run side by side with parents supporting teachers in school and on visits, running toy and book libraries, and working with teachers in their own homes. The facilities, resources and opportunities found in Combined Nursery Centres encourage strong home-school links (Siraj-Blatchford paper). Athey (1990) suggests that involving school staff, parents and other professionals within the community can enhance children's intellectual development. *"Parents and professionals can help children separately or they can work together for the greater benefit of children"* (Athey, 1990, p.66). It is these partnerships of parents and professionals that enhance learning. In the development of an effective relationship between parents and professionals, commitment and effort are needed from the educators; it is their responsibility to ensure that parents have access to relevant information and opportunities to discuss their children's needs.

In the United States, the NAEYC (1990, p.22) recognises the impact of parents on their children's educational achievements, *"since parental expectations are the most powerful predictor of children's later school success"*. This recognition has led the NAEYC to identify parental involvement as one of the key elements in quality early years programmes, specifically through strengthening the parents' role as first teachers and providing opportunities for parent education. Such a partnership is enhanced by scheduling regular

parent/teacher conferences or interviews, welcoming parents into school at all times and respecting cultural and family differences. Parents should be encouraged to use the teaching skills they have in the classroom as well as at home. Reading stories, sharing cultural and family traditions and assisting with decision-making where appropriate will strengthen the home-school links and empower parents to continue their role as the first educators of their children.

In Canada, the British Columbia Ministry of Education (1992) addresses the issue of establishing parent partnerships with schools by focusing on communication between the home and school as the important link. Parents need to continue their involvement in the lives of their children, even as children move into the school years and a long list of suggestions ranging from informal notes to formal conferences are offered to bridge the gap between home and school. In addition, a resource booklet, *'Supporting Learning'*, has been prepared for distribution to parents of children attending schools in British Columbia. The booklet provides evidence from educational research of how children learn and make meaning of their world and experiences. Although the booklet provides information for parents as they continue to be teachers of their children, it is a support document that enables parents to contribute to the education of their children as well as to receive information on their progress and learning.

Also in Canada, Alberta Education (1984) stresses that whilst the family has a key role, it is a shared responsibility of "*parents, staff and community services*" to support the development of children, socially, emotionally, intellectually, physically and creatively. Alberta Education places a great deal of importance on the involvement of parents in kindergarten programmes. Since parents have had a special relationship with their children from the moment of birth, it is paramount that these relationships continue, even as the child moves from the home environment to that of the school. These kindergarten programmes support parental involvement, not only by offering an open-door policy with respect to classroom participation, but by providing parent education programmes designed to increase parents' knowledge of child development. Parents are also involved in an advisory capacity with respect to decision-making related to policy development and programme implementation and evaluation.

Most schools in Alberta have parent representatives on a school council and their input, whilst it is advisory in nature, is generally valued and considered.

In addition to discussing curriculum matters, the parent councils often raise funds to cover extra activities that the school budget cannot sustain and organise school-wide events and celebrations. The involvement of parents on the school councils does not preclude their valued input in the classroom as assistants who are actively involved in their children's learning, since most Alberta schools encourage parents to be directly involved in the classroom.

Italy, too, highly regards the important role that parents play in their children's schooling. Although parents are limited in their involvement of planning and organising the educational activities, the law regulates parental involvement on two levels. First, the Parents' Assembly, comprised of the parents of all the children of a particular class or school, is required by law to meet and discuss the educational provision of the school. Second, an elected representative from the parents of each class attends an Interclass Council where educational innovations are discussed and proposed. Although the Italian laws aimed at parent involvement have been established for several years, the degree of implementation is dependent upon local practice and is not consistently enforced.

The principles and practice of the preschools of Reggio Emilia in Italy are gaining considerable international attention (Fyfe, 1994). The schools strive to be welcoming, open and democratic to ensure the well being of children, teachers and families. They invite an exchange of ideas, with parental participation regarded as an essential element in the process. The role of parents takes many forms, including day-to-day interaction during work in schools and discussions on educational issues, but the schools are eager to encourage greater parental involvement in the monthly planning, appraisal meetings to enable parents to become full partners in the education process.

Day et al. (1990, p.206) caution against using parents solely as classroom assistants, as not only will the proportion of parents involved be small, it can also be threatening to teachers. Their teaching can be publicly viewed and superficially evaluated without a deeper understanding. In order for parental involvement to be effective it is essential to develop

> *"... a clear and articulate philosophy of education with respect to the desired relations between home and school, for without this, the head has no criteria by which to decide between opposing possibilities."*
>
> (Day et al ,op cit p.197)

Involving parents as **working partners** results in benefits to all stakeholders (Day et al., op cit.). Not only is the academic performance of their children enhanced, but parents gain first-hand knowledge of the functioning of the school, thus providing a firmer foundation and understanding for discussing the progress of their children. In addition, the parents can offer a wide range of skills and interests that can benefit the educational programme and administration. In a partnership that involves trust and ease of communication, teachers stand to gain important information from parents that may assist in developing programmes for future learning. Parents who are better informed and aware of the activities of the school will be stronger supporters and thus become important public relations speakers for the school. Whilst recognising the importance of parents as public relations officers for the school, Strahan (1994) stresses that communication and participation are the integral elements in developing a meaningful partnership based on mutual respect and understanding. Involving parents in the educational process requires careful consideration of the needs of children, teachers and parents, and frequent discussion of the extent of the partnership and the direction that it is taking in order to ensure the optimum development of opportunities to extend children's learning.

Often "... *parents tend to undervalue their own influence and potential as vital factors in their children's learning, except over matters where they see themselves as competent*" (Blatchford et al. in Clark, 1988, p.74). Parents must be empowered by the school to participate in the education of their children. They need, in many cases, to regain a feeling of worthiness, respect and partnership with schools in order to ensure the best possible education for their children. Neufeld (1990) supports the positive influence that parents can have on pupil achievement. She (p.264) cites Chubb on the importance of interweaving effective school organisation and parent involvement:

> *"The largest estimated influence of the effectiveness of school organisation is the role of parents in the school. All other things being equal, schools in which parents are highly involved, co-operative and well-informed are more likely to develop effective organisations than are schools in which parents do not possess these qualities."*

The interweaving of school and parents must be dependent upon the individuality of school approaches. Each school must be given the flexibility to develop partnership models which are best suited to their individual needs.

> *"There is no set of clear and unequivocal 'answers' to major questions on how to work effectively with parents and governors because the solution to a problem has to be found in that situation and not imported from outside that school's environment."*
>
> (Day et al., op. cit. p.198)

As Jennings (1977, p.vii) has said *"It is only fools who learn by experience. Wise men do not have to learn of the existence of every brick wall by banging their noses on it"*, and guidelines discussed in this chapter, that have proved to be successful in many situations, will provide a framework for schools as they establish a model of home-school partnerships based on their individual needs.

Conclusion

Since the early 1900s there has been a significant change in the thinking about the role of parents in their children's education. It is now recognised that much learning takes place outside schools, and that the family are central to children's development. In spite of all the recent regressive tendencies in British education it is hard to imagine that there could be a return to the exclusively school-centred views of earlier times. Existing models of meaningful partnerships between home and school indicate that these relationships help meet the goals of both parents and teachers to the benefit of the children.

The way forward

- The acceptance by all stakeholders of the concept of mutual partnership involving shared goals, shared expertise, a shared understanding of the learning needs of the children, and shared decision-making (curriculum planning and evaluation , assessment of pupils).

- The recognition that initial teacher education and continuing professional development must prepare teachers for working in partnership with parents and should include consideration of new initiatives, research and international experience.

- The recognition that parents and teachers will increasingly become part of multi-professional teams in which they, together with assistants, carers and others, will engage in a process of critically interlinked education and care.

- The encouragement of initiatives in nursery schools, classes and centres which build on parent partnerships, and are then appropriately modified in later stages of schooling.

- The significant move towards the involvement of children in developing responsibility for their own learning and assessment, not in isolation, but in partnership with parents and teachers.

- The promotion of family-centred schools which includes the development of a caring curriculum that focusses on the shared learning process amongst children, parents and teachers.

- The vital necessity for continuing research into the aspects of home-school partnerships that are most conducive to promoting children's learning.

- A coordinated and comprehensive effort by all those concerned - families, education, health, social services - to work together to provide the best possible education and care for young children.

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Stories from the classroom: what works? Developmentally appropriate practice

by Jennifer Little

The Butterfly

I remember one morning when I discovered a cocoon in the back of a tree just as a butterfly was making a hole in its case and preparing to come out. I waited awhile, but it was too long in appearing and I was impatient. I bent over it and breathed on it to warm it. I warmed it as quickly as I could and the miracle began to happen before my eyes, faster than life. The case opened, the butterfly started slowly crawling out, and I shall never forget my horror when I saw how its wings were folded back and crumpled; the wretched butterfly tried with its whole trembling body to unfold them. Bending over it, I tried to help it with my breath, in vain.

It needed to be hatched out patiently and the unfolding of the wings should be a gradual process in the sun. Now it was too late. My breath had forced the butterfly to appear all crumpled, before its time. It struggled desperately and, a few seconds later, died in the palm of my hand.

That little body is, I do believe, the greatest weight I have on my conscience. For I realize today that it is a mortal sin to violate the laws of nature. We should not hurry, we should not be impatient, but we should confidently obey the eternal rhythm (from Zorba the Greek, Kazantakis, 1952*).*

A growing number of educational associations have embraced the notion of a developmentally appropriate curriculum for young children that is age appropriate and individual appropriate. In such a programme, emphasis is placed on "*active, hands-on learning; conceptual learning that leads to understanding along with the acquisition of basic skills; meaningful, relevant learning experiences; interactive teaching and co-operative learning; and a*

broad range of relevant content, integrated across traditional subject divisions" (NAEYC, 1990 p.22). It is the needs of the children that are paramount in the school, and whilst social, economic and political forces have engineered change in society over the years, the basic developmental needs of children have remained constant. The demands of a National Curriculum and the ominous presence of attainment targets may pressure teachers into presenting nursery and reception children with a more structured and inappropriate version of the curriculum, one designed to prepare them for the Key Stage 1 SATs, taking little note of individual differences and rates of growth and development. The problem of a downward extension of primary school into kindergartens and nurseries can be easily overcome by ensuring developmentally appropriate practises match the child's developmental level.

Children often come to their first school experience like Zorba's butterfly - from the security of their home cocoon, where they have plenty of time to stretch out their wings - all too often to a school environment where expectations may be unreasonable for some children.

> *Max came to year one expecting to find a room full of the kinds of things he had left behind at the end of kindergarten. He did not want to write. Any attempts produced faint, spidery markings which even Max could not explain or decipher, nor did he wish to explain them, as he had no interest at all in activities that required writing. He had great difficulty sitting still and was not in the least interested in reading.*
>
> *Max especially enjoyed maths times where he could explore the manipulatives in the tubs. One day, he sat engrossed, for a much longer period of time than he had previously done, in an activity using geometric shapes. Clean-up came and, still, Max continued to work, oblivious to the children around him. Finally he came to take me to see what he had made - a highly designed, three-dimensional model of a four-wheeled vehicle. As the model could not be saved 'forever', I took a picture of it and Max was very anxious to WRITE about the picture. The pride on his face was evident - the gradual process of the unfolding of his wings had begun. From that point on, Max began to fly, slowly and tentatively, but with a*

> *newly-acquired confidence that he, too, could accomplish what he saw others doing*

As educators, it is important for us to ensure that the 'butterflies' that arrive in our classrooms have a chance to let their wings dry so they can fly. Instead of expecting children to come to school prepared for the rigid demands of a highly specific curriculum, it is the schools that must meet the needs of **all** children and endeavour to provide opportunities that will maximise progress for every child for every year.

This is because " ... *learning is a continuous experience and children learn in different ways and at different times, even though they happen to be the same age*" (Alberta Education, 1990). In order to provide continuity in learning for children, it is important for schools to develop instructional practices that are based upon principles of child development. These principles are conclusions formed by researchers in education, and allow for a broad range in children's needs, learning rates and styles, knowledge, experience and interests, with the underlying factors being that children are individuals and that each child is unique.

In a recent British national survey (Blenkin and Yue, 1994) it was shown that heads of early years colleges consistently ranked knowledge of child development as the prime feature of influence in the professional development of practitioners. Interestingly, heads of schools ranked it similarly. There is not an established number of principles of child development. Educational researchers, however, have identified many important principles that enable teachers to provide instructional programmes that do maximise progress. The following stories illustrate the relationship between ten principles of child development and examples of instructional practices that are compatible with continuity in learning.

Children need a positive self-image in order to develop their individual potentials

The way they feel about themselves is related to the way they learn (Bruner, 1960; Phillips, 1994). This idea, that children with a positive self-concept are more likely to become involved in learning activities, is highlighted in many countries (Spain, Odina, 1993; Italy, Pusci, 1993; Sweden, Bergman, 1993; Canada, British Columbia, 1992 and Alberta, 1988).

Max's story illustrates that, as he demonstrated his abilities with blocks and received positive feedback from his teacher and his classmates, his self-concept was enhanced and he gained the confidence to try other learning activities.

Children ought to be presented with frequent opportunities to meet and master meaningful challenges. Positive self-esteem can be encouraged in programmes that offer choice and exploration in a wide variety of areas. Teachers should endeavour to ensure, in the daily choice of activities, the availability of materials and learning situations involving, amongst other things, conversation, literature, story-writing, mathematical concepts, designed to meet the programme objectives. The feedback that children receive, from the teacher and from peers, will support and nurture feelings of productivity and success in the learning environment.

Instructional practices that promote a positive self-concept are:

- learning centres
- project work
- use of manipulatives for science and maths
- Readers and Writers' Workshops
- co-operative learning strategies
- involving children in setting goals and selecting topics of study
- encouraging children to be involved in the evaluation of their own work
- provision of multi-cultural activities and resources

Children need to make meaning of their world, based on the experiences they have already learned, experienced and constructed

In early years, experiences enhanced by continual and meaningful involvement and interaction with the environment set the pace for future learning (Piaget, 1977; Caine and Caine, 1991).

> *Jasmine was having a difficult time in her year one class trying to make all the connections she needed to read. She struggled on, always cheerful, but making little progress. Towards the end of the year, as she worked diligently, but with little success, trying to read some very simple maths stories, she asked if she could continue to work whilst the rest of the class came together for story time. Gradually, we*

> *became aware of a small voice in the background - reading! "Jasmine can read!" the children on the carpet exclaimed, and she certainly could! The look of pride and accomplishment on her face, as she heard the excitement in the voices of her classmates, was truly wonderful. Jasmine had finally put together all the components she needed to make sense of printed materials and the last four weeks of the school year were taken in leaps and bounds as she spent much of her time reading to herself, her classmates and her siblings.*

Children need to be encouraged to make connections between new knowledge and old, and to use this information to solve problems and to make sense of new experiences. Teachers must recognise the importance of the children's previous learning as a basis for new learning (Dowling, 1995). As children realize the importance of their own knowledge and experience to the learning process, they will become more involved and begin to take ownership of it.

Instructional practices that encourage these connections are:

- brainstorming, webbing, networking
- co-operative learning projects
- language experience stories and charts
- Readers' and Writers' Workshops
- integrating language learning into all curriculum areas

Children should be involved in active rather than passive activities

Although rapid physical growth generally slows down after the age of five, children in the early years of school, including reception and year one, need physical activity to help them comprehend new concepts (Katz and Chard, 1989). Children should have opportunities to manipulate real objects instead of just reading about them, looking at pictures of them on a workbook page or listening to teachers tell about them.

> *When the children in a first-grade class were asked to give their impressions of a manipulative maths programmme which they had worked on all year, their responses clearly indicated the active aspect of it.*

> "I like math bekus it is fun. Werking with mony and werking with kownters."
>
> "I like math becos we do the Good Food Restrant. I like tubs becos it is fun."
>
> "I like math becus it is fun and we lrne lots of things. Befor I didn't kno wat 10c was but now I do and the tubs are nete and fun and intrising. I relly like them."

The children's answers speak for themselves. As they actively engage in manipulative, learning activities, children will make connections to real-life situations. The teacher should establish an environment which will link children's explorations to their developing concepts in the different areas of the curriculum.

Instructional practices that encourage development through active engagement in the environment are:

- use of manipulatives for maths and science
- water and sand tables
- exploration centres
- play centres (drama, blocks)

Children acquire, develop and express their understandings through the use of language - written and oral language develop concurrently

When children engage in interactive conversations with peers and teachers, their communication skills are strengthened, enabling them to express in writing the understandings they have acquired through talk (Lemke, 1987).

> *In co-operative learning groups, the year one children were working on a science activity that involved dissolving different substances in water. When questioned about what was happening, the children could respond that the salt or sugar 'went away', but they did not yet have the word 'dissolve' in their vocabularies. Once given this new word, they used it often throughout the rest of that day and for the next several days. Journal entries talked about Kool-*

Aid, bath salts and sugar 'dissolving' in various situations at home.

In order to receive, process and express an understanding of what occurs in the learning environment, children need to successfully acquire and use language and thinking skills. Unless the learning environment offers opportunities for dialogue, paraphrasing and extending meaning, language, as a vehicle of thought, will not be utilised to its maximum potential.

Instructional practices which encourage the acquisition of these skills are:

- discussions centres aound thematic units of study
- brainstorming, webbing, networking
- Readers' and Writers' Workshops
- a reading programme based on quality literature
- journals
- co-operative learning activities
- multi-age groupings
- book buddies
- peer coaching

Children pursue learning in an holistic way, without restrictions imposed by subject-area boundaries

All the domains of development - social, emotional, cognitive, physical and creative - are integrated (Caine and Caine, 1991). Each influences and is influenced by the others.

Jordan had returned from a visit to a museum and was extremely anxious to relate the wonderful things he had learned about dinosaurs. Although the class was studying dinosaurs, the activities and discussions centred around this theme were scheduled for later in the day. Jordan took an early opportunity to write about his trip in his journal, share his information with the class as he read his journal from the author's chair and show the classroom dinosaur models to further explain his new knowledge. Jordan's 'write and tell' all took place during a part of the day usually designated as a language learning period. Later, when we actually worked on our theme study of Dinosaurs, the class all had questions,

based on Jordan's talk, that they wanted to research further. Whilst they acquired new information related to science, these students also developed their skills in language learning, mathematics and art, as they read, wrote, talked, measured and drew.

Children are continually making connections between the knowledge they have acquired in the different domains and do not need to distinguish learning by subject area.

Instructional practices which encourage holistic conne·tions are:

- integrated curriculum
- thematic units
- brainstorming, networking, webbing
- journals
- project work
- learning centres
- opportunities for spontaneous play

Children vary widely in their rates of physical growth and the timing of their growth rates

Each child is a unique individual with an individual pattern and timing of growth (Alberta Education, 1988, NAEYC, 1990). Although the following story is about just one child, the stories of each of the children in our classrooms illustrate this uniqueness.

Amy walked into the classroom on the first day of school with an obvious air of confidence. She was physically very small, but excited about this new experience in her life. As the year progressed, some of Amy's confidence flagged, particularly during some of the physical education activities. Amy just could not co-ordinate all the movements she needed to skip with a rope. Many of the other children in the class were able to jump rope early on in the year, and Amy found her inability in this area to be a great frustration. She persevered, though, with encouragement from her classmates and with many opportunities to practice in the physical education programme and on the playground. It was not

until late spring that the children came in after play break one day to tell me excitedly that Amy had skipped "three times in a row". Amy herself was thrilled at this breakthrough and each day after would rush in to report her increased ability. It was not long before Amy was able to join her friends in skipping games. Amy's time HAD come.

Children need a variety of opportunities to meet the various stages of development within a particular classroom and they should be allowed to progress at their own pace in order to maximise their learning.

Instructional practices which allow for individual rates of development are:

- use of manipulatives (particularly for maths and science)
- co-operative learning situations
- Readers' and Writers' Workshops
- daily physical education with a variety of different-sized equipment and opportunities to practice different levels of skills
- multi-age groupings
- learning centres

Children learn through collaboration with others

What children do together today, they can do alone tomorrow (Vygotsky, 1978). Children involved in co-operative learning situations learn better, develop more positive self-concepts, get along better with their peers and are more accepting of those who are different (Fiske, 1992).

Connie was a special needs student in our year one classroom. In addition to special learning needs, Connie was extremely shy. She was integrated with the regular classroom activities for most of the day. Whilst much of the programme was adapted for her, Connie was a part of co-operative learning groups for maths and science activities. The other children in her group were very patient and seemed to know instinctively how to adapt the activities for her and how to explain what was happening. Connie blossomed in her surroundings - she began to look her friends and teachers in the eye, she lost the stoop in her walk, and, most surprising to many of us, she began to respond appropriately to class

discussions. It was the support and feedback that Connie received from her peers that helped her to grow and to continue to grow when she was apart from her support group in the classroom.

Children develop socially, emotionally and intellectually through interaction with others. Teachers need to recognise the importance of developing positive peer-group relationships and provide opportunities for co-operative learning situations that engage children in conversation, challenge their thinking and extend their ideas.

Instructional practices that provide opportunities to develop these positive relationships are:

- co-operative group projects
- peer coaching
- Readers' and Writers' Workshop
- learning centres
- multi-aged groupings
- inclusion policies for **all** children

Families play a significant role in the growth and development of the child

Parents are the first teachers of their children and should continue to be involved in the educational process, even as their children enter formal schooling (NAEYC, 1988; ECEC, 1991).

Donald was very quick to respond to mini-lessons in language learning or discussions of concepts in other curriculum areas with, "I know that. My dad already taught me that." It was important to Donald that his dad also knew the things that he was learning in school. We invited Donald's dad to come to the classroom and speak to the children on a topic of special interest to him. Donald's pride and delight were evident on his face as his dad shared stories, demonstrated the differences in seeds, taught the children about reforestation and gave each of them the opportunity to plant a tree.

Parents should be viewed as integral partners in the instructional process. They have nurtured and taught their children up to the first day of school. They will continue to teach their children, even as the school years go by. As partners in education, parents can provide powerful insight to the school with regards to their children's learning styles, interests and experiences.

Instructional practices that encourage the partnership of home and school are:

- frequent communication with parents
- home visits by the teacher
- encouraging parents and other family members to participate in classroom activities and assist with learning groups, as well as making materials
- encouraging parents to share cultures, traditions and unique skills with the class
- providing parents with opportunities to assist with decision-making where appropriate

Children learn through play

At one time or another, we have all heard the saying "*Children's play is their work*" (CACE, 1967; Abbott, 1994). And hard work it is. At any one time, in a play situation in nursery, reception and even year one, children playing in a group may be involved not only in collaborating, negotiating, choosing, organising, questioning, responding, explaining, but in many aspects of cognitive, physical and creative development.

> *Emma , Kelly and James were playing at the sand table. Using moulds to make castles and their hands to fashion moats and bridges, they worked earnestly together. Their chatter was continual as they busied themselves with their work. They discussed castles, flags, knights and battles. When none of them could remember the name for the moat, Emma came to the classroom assistant, took her to the sand table and asked what the "deep road filled with water" was really called. Kelly wanted to know why castles were surrounded by moats, while James was eagerly pouring water into the moat and drawing the others attention to how the sand caved in as the water ran around. The three then began a discussion of how to strengthen the moat walls and tried*

> *various solutions. Amongst many other new learning experiences, all three children added a new word to their vocabularies. Emma wrote about the 'mot, James about the 'mt' and Kelly, who was in year one of this multi-aged reception year one class, wrote a lovely story of 'a sand kingdom', the 'mote' construction being an important part of the story.*

At the sand table described above, where the three children were, for all intents and purposes, playing, language development was enhanced as opportunities for oral speech were encouraged and topic specific vocabulary was introduced, practised and reinforced. Thinking skills were enhanced through questioning, observing, testing and problem-solving. Social responsibility was developing as the children interacted with each other in a co-operative situation, involving sharing, compromising and teamwork. Physically, both fine and gross motor skills were developed as the children, with and without utensils, manipulated, scooped, lifted and poured the sand. Their learning was further extended as they later wrote about their experiences at the sand table: recalling, writing, reading and illustrating. All in all, a great deal of **work** by any standards, but all accomplished in the context of play. It is evident that play which is both purposeful and enjoyable is an important component of early years programmes. The conclusion of the Rumbold Committee (cited in Abbott, op cit., p.52) sums up the importance of play: "*It has a fundamental role in early childhood education, supplying the foundation upon which learning is built*".

Instructional strategies that encourage learning through play are:

-the provision and resourcing of play centres (sand, water, blocks)
-the provision of areas in the classroom allowing for role play
-opportunities for and access to outdoor play

Assessment of young children should be 'authentic'

Authentic assessment involves engaging children in meaningful activities from the real world that require knowledge in use (Willis, 1993). It is on-going. It involves self-assessment. It reflects the process of learning. It should measure whether or not teachers have offered children opportunities for exploring, constructing and communicating meaning. It involves a partnership of child, parents and teacher. Portfolios, or profiles, can provide authentic evidence of learning that shows progress over time.

John was six and hard of hearing. He could communicate with signs and was beginning to speak as well. An assistant was assigned to the class to give him help as he required it. John had experienced a great deal of difficulty in his prior school experiences at nursery and reception. At the beginning of year one, his teacher explained to the class the purposes of their portfolios and how they would themselves contribute to them. John was an eager participant in the portfolio selection from the start. When interview time came, John climbed onto the middle of the table and dumped the contents of his portfolio. He proceeded to take each sample and lead his parents through a discussion of what he had done and learned. His parents (and the teacher) struggled with damp eyes for the duration of the interview. His parents were ecstatic that John's attitude towards learning had become such a positive one - so worried were they about his apathy and negativeness in his prior schooling. Apparently, John's own involvement and notion of himself as a contributor to his learning and evaluation changed his attitude towards learning.

As John's story illustrates, the use of portfolio assessment often evolves naturally into child-led parent/teacher conferences. He was eager and delighted to present his portfolio contents to his parents and to explain his learning and understanding as he demonstrated, with work samples that showed progress over time, the processes that often led to his comprehension of the curriculum. John's parents, in turn, expressed amazement, not only at the learning itself, but at the way their child could articulate his own learning. Teachers must make daily decisions that will affect the learning of the children in their classrooms. Only teachers, who are at the grass roots levels of the day-to-day school lives of their pupils, can recommend the appropriate intervention strategies that will meet the unique needs of each child. They will need assistance, especially for very young children, from parents, from involved agencies and from the children themselves in order to make the best possible decisions that will promote children's learning.

Instructional strategies that ensure authentic assessment are:

-use of portfolio assessment
-recorded anecdotal observations
-interviewing children

-using performance based-assessment
-involving the children in their own assessment through self-reflection and self-evaluation
-involving parents in the assessment process

Researchers have provided educators with a view of pupils as "*learners who are actively involved in building up a personal knowledge of the world around them through action, experience and reflection*" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1990). The ten principles of child development highlighted in this chapter, along with many others, provide direction for teachers to support learning through a balanced emphasis on social, emotional, physical, creative, cognitive and moral development , beginning in the early years and continuing through primary school. As teachers, we want children to cater school and continue a journey of lifelong learning. The challenge for us, then, is to ensure that the *"content of the curriculum is taught so as to take optimum advantage of the child's natural abilities, interests and enthusiasm for learning"* (NAEYC, 1990) in order to maximise the overall progress of each pupil each year. Using the principles of child development as a guide, teachers can easily accept this challenge and plan a developmentally appropriate programme that stimulates the children and encourages them to be actively involved in their learning journey, not as Montessori (1919, p.14) cautioned *"like butterflies mounted on pins, the children are fastened each to his place, the desk, spreading the useless wings of barren and meaningless knowledge which they have acquired"*, but, as Zorba discovered, gradually and patiently being allowed to unfold their wings, *"obeying the eternal rhythms"*.

A Glossary of Terms

Co-operative Learning is an "*organisational structure in which a group of children pursue academic goals through collaborative efforts. Children work together in small groups, draw on each other's strengths, and assist each other in completing a task*" (Hilke, 1990). Co-operative learning fosters co-operation amongst children, encourages positive group relationships, develops self-esteem in children, and enhances academic achievement. Co-operative learning builds upon the strengths of each child in a group and encourages communication and social skills that are needed to develop a good working relationship.

Language Learning is the term used by Alberta Education to encompass children's learning in reading, writing, speaking and listening. The rationale for grouping these under the umbrella of language learning states that *"in language learning, the processes of listening, speaking, reading and writing are interrelated and mutually supportive"*(Alberta Education, 1993).

Performance-based Assessment. Children are assessed as they carry out specific tasks designed to replicate real-life situations. Often this can be an open-ended problem that has the flexibility for many solutions or roads to solutions that take into account individual diversity in learning styles and rates of development.

Project Work. *"A project is an in-depth study of a particular topic that one or more children undertake."* (Katz and Chard, 1989). A project explores a topic or a theme over a period of days or weeks depending upon the nature of the study and the ages of the children involved. Children are involved in planning the various aspects of the project and are involved in activities relating to the project for several days of weeks. The teacher supports the children's learning by encouraging and helping them to make meaning of their interactions with adults and peers, with objects and with their environment.

Readers' Workshop provides opportunities for *"children to become readers and to continue to grow as readers: choosing their own books, spending time reading and talking about them, responding to them from their hearts and experiences and recommending them to one another"* (MacKenzie, 1992 p.8). During Readers' Workshop, pupils choose and read books alone, or with a group, write personal responses in journals or dialogue letters and present and recommend what they have read to their classmates. The teacher collaborates with the children, supporting them in their choice of literature, helping them to read, conferencing with them, reading and writing in response journals, teaching whole or small group lessons and modelling, themselves, what a 'real reader' does (MacKenzie, 1992).

Writers' Workshop provides opportunities for children to choose the topics they wish to write about and time to do pre-writing, drafting, conferencing, revising, editing and publishing. Pupils are assisted by the teacher and peers who act as resources, sounding boards, editors and audience. The teacher supports learning by presenting whole class or small group lessons based on observations of what the pupils require to improve their writing.

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Questions of quality

by Tony Bertram and Christine Pascal

Introduction

Quality is the buzz word of current educational debate. Almost every recent early childhood book and conference seems to have the word in its title. This focus on quality is interesting and disturbing. As an aspiration for which we all strive, quality can give us a feeling of common purpose, even though we might not be sure of what it is or how it is realised. That is part of its attractiveness. Quality is universally admired as long as it is not made explicit. As soon as we begin to define it more tightly, our consensus begins to disappear.

There is a danger in this. If quality is only acceptable when it is a generalised, vague goal, it loses its meaning and becomes of little help to those seeking genuine improvement. We can see this beginning to happen now. The word is over used and abused in much the same way as the word 'standards' was during the years of the debate surrounding the Education Reform Act. 'Standards' has now become much less fashionable amongst those in search of rigour in provision for young children and has been replaced by the more nebulous term, 'quality'. An uneasy feeling remains amongst many early years' practitioners that the ubiquitous emphasis on the pursuit of 'quality' is a cloak for the same inappropriate, de-skilling, threatening processes of assessment that have gone before. The danger is that when quality evaluation becomes viewed as something that is going to be done to them, by somebody, under conditions over which they have no control, practitioners can become fearful and alienated.

Our feeling is that 'quality', to use the vernacular, is having a 'bad press' and we wish to reclaim it and make it explicit. In this chapter, we want to explore definitions of quality and its assessment, and show how it can be achieved through a process of effective, democratic evaluation. In this way the process of evaluation can, in itself, lead to the enhancement of individual provision, and the development and empowerment of staff within their settings.

Why is quality on the agenda?

The movement to expand provision for young children is happening world wide. Even The World Bank is now arguing that the development of third world countries is more dependent on raising the aspirations of women than on the building of high profile constructions like dams. A former Deputy Director of the OECD, George Papadopolous (1993), has also acknowledged that education must be available from the cradle to the grave. In this respect he saw that much had been done in the post-school period but that little, as yet, had been done to address the educational needs of the pre-school child. In the UK we have some of the finest provision in the world with purpose built settings and graduate level staff, but it is not universally available. Provision is patchy, and often, part time and of variable quality.

The UK has one of the poorest records for state provision of pre-school provision in the European Union (Moss 1990). This puts us at an economic disadvantage with our continental competitors who, because of their greater investment in pre-school provision, have a larger pool of women to call on in their workforce. The move to employ women, often part-time, in dextrous assembly work or in service industries is characteristic of new business growth and is matched by the increase in unemployment for men, who were traditionally engaged in the heavy industries such as coal or steel. There are clearly economic reasons why provision needs to expand and this pressure will increase should the UK opt into the Social Chapter. It is at present the only country to exclude itself. The situation will be further exacerbated as we emerge from recession and the effects of the demographic time bomb, masked at present by the still high unemployment figures, become more apparent. The huge fall in the sections of the population who will be school leavers over the next 10 years means that industry must look to their female workforce as a source of cheap labour. Such factors seem very far from the concerns of early years workers but they are very much part of the realpolitik of the modern political world.

In addition to these economic and demographic factors, there are changes in society which are impacting on provision for young children. The women's movement see this as a key area in their just goal of total emancipation of women. Not only is this a powerful and influential lobby group which is addressing a basic right but it is also helped by national and European legislation aimed at eliminating discrimination. Whilst we applaud this

movement, we also feel it is wrong to view provision for young children as simply an issue for women. It is an issue for society and families, and fundamental to the development and fulfilment of all the individuals within it. Nevertheless, the equal opportunity lobby are key players in getting Government to address the problem of lack of provision for the young child.

Another factor which is highlighting the need for a review of pre-school provision is the changing pattern of family life. Concern has been expressed by many agencies about the paucity of many children's early experiences (Rowntree Report, 1995). There are fewer opportunities for play and exploration in our urban communities than in the past. Parents are more fearful for their children than were their parents and they are also working longer hours. More women are raising their children as single parents and need help and support from society to do so. Many single parents are trapped into poverty by lack of adequate provision for their children and could be much more economically productive if they had access to it. Pfeffer and Coote (1991) and Holtermann (1992) calculate that there would be a net gain to the exchequer through reduction in benefits and payment of tax if Government addressed the need for more free provision.

Why is quality important?

All of these influences, however, are essentially concerned with the question of increasing the quantity of provision. To some extent they provide a smoke screen for the arguably more important debate about increasing the quality of provision. Yet there have been a wealth of national reports over recent years which have highlighted the need, not only for provision to be increased, but also, for it to be of high quality (DES, 1990; National Commission on Education, 1993; Start Right Report, 1994; House of Commons Select Committee, 1994a).

The issue of quality has been given further impetus by the growing body of research evidence that shows that the quality of provision is a key aspect of successful outcomes for children's attitudes to learning, for their development and, indeed, for the coherence of society. Sylva and Wiltshire (1993) summarise some of these findings, and increasingly we are also obtaining evidence from the fields of anthropology, behavioural and developmental psychology, social cognition, sociology, paediatrics, neuro-psychology and

cognitive science which add weight to the evidence. Important in these is the work of Gerald Edelman (1992) and his concept of 'Neural Darwinism', which suggests that the brain develops through a process of natural selection rather than through 'learning'. This process is a dialogue between the genetic predisposition of children and their environment. The challenge for early childhood educators is to shape the environment to maximise discovery and development, and to ensure that others are there to support, challenge and reward this learning. There is now available research evidence from around the world (Sylva and Wiltshire, 1993) which conveys the clear message that if it is to be effective, early childhood provision has to be of high quality and display certain characteristics.

How do we define quality?

There is a wide consensus about the essentials of quality in early childhood provision. Our experience in working with some 750 practitioners from all over the UK during the Effective Early Learning Research Project, EEL, (Pascal et al., 1995) has confirmed this. Bruce (1987) has pointed to a value base of core agreed principles that have existed historically in the 'common tradition' of early childhood philosophy. It is on these principles that the consensus on what constitutes the dimensions of quality provision for young children rests. Williams' (1995) review of quality approaches in early childhood reveals how the underpinning principles of the Children Act, Volume 2 of the Guidance (Dept. of Health, 1991), the Rumbold Report, (DES, 1990) and the RSA Start Right Report (Ball, 1993), all acknowledge these principles, to a greater or lesser extent. In addition, the National Children's Bureau (Cowley, 1991), the Kids Clubs Network (1989), the Pre-school Playgroups Association (1990 a, b) and the National Childminding Association (1991), have all produced guidelines or recommendations which encompass the same principles. In the US, the Carnegie Report (1994) and the NAEYC Guidelines on Developmental Learning (Bredekamp, 1987) also affirm these same principles. New Zealand and Australian early years experts concur (Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, 1988). The EXE Project in Belgium (Laevers, 1994) and the world wide High Scope Programme can also be seen to fit these core values. There is thus a strong, historical, comparative, diverse grouping of early childhood expertise which shares this view of high quality, and agree over the areas that must be evaluated for it to be achieved.

The dimensions of quality identified by the EEL Research Project (Pascal and Bertram, 1994a,b) may be taken as typical example and demonstrate the breadth of issues that any definition of quality must embrace. They include:

- aims and objectives
- curriculum/learning experiences
- learning and teaching strategies
- planning, assessment and record keeping
- staffing
- physical environment
- relationships and interactions
- equal opportunities
- parental partnership, home and community liaison
- monitoring and evaluation

Using a carefully structured, rigorous framework, participants in the Project from a wide range of early childhood settings have collected evidence for each of the dimensions of quality, using a variety of research techniques. They receive training in these techniques but, essentially, the process is one of validated, self assessment. Williams suggests that *"It has demonstrated that quality can be evaluated constructively even whilst embracing its subjective nature"* (1995).

This reference to subjectivity, perhaps, needs to be elaborated further in our discussion of quality definitions. Judgements about quality are inevitably value laden. It is impossible to evaluate without making judgments about what is to be valued. Interpretations and emphasis will depend upon the beliefs, attitudes and values of those whom you ask. Politicians, parents, managers, practitioners and the children, themselves, may all have differing perceptions about what, for them, makes a quality setting. For this reason, the Effective Early Learning Project deliberately seeks to adopt a democratic approach in evidence gathering, ensuring that all views are represented. Everybody has a voice, even though those voices may not carry equal weight. Participation, however, is recognised as important in getting a complete picture. It is also important in securing agreement about successful outcomes. Evaluation, after all, must be linked to development and if a feeling of partnership and shared ownership is established in the evaluation phase, there is a greater chance of successful implementation when improvement is tackled. So judgments about quality are linked to perspective and the more triangulation and active

involvement there is in the evidence gathering, the more comprehensive will be the picture.

The notion of quality as being centred in the experience and enlightened awareness of the individual is a central conclusion in the novelist Pirsig's (1974) debate on quality. It is not a romantic notion. Business gurus such as Handy (1994) and Peters (1992) support it. Japanese car manufacturers recognise that quality does not come from manuals and targets sent down from on high but by empowering the individual operative to take pride in producing work of the highest quality. They make judgements about that, with support and help from external moderators and with continual training. The 'intuitive feel good' approach as Williams (1995) calls it, has a very hard-nosed and rigorous edge, and has been tested by some of the most demanding managers in the world of industry and commerce.

Other factors in defining quality are those of time and place. Quality is not a fixed point on a scale, it changes. What may be high quality at one time, in one set of circumstances may not be viewed as high quality at a later time, or in a different place, or in different circumstances. A definition of quality therefore has to allow for its dynamic nature. Brighouse (1995) talks of 'improving on previous best'. Pfeffer and Coote (1991) talk of fitness for purpose, of responsiveness and of democratising the evaluative process. These definitions of quality allow for the change. Our definition concurs with this. We believe that quality judgments in early childhood settings should be defined by the shared reflections and agreement of the stake holders using a rigorous and systematic process of evaluation. Quality comes from a constant cycle of evaluation and development which incrementally moves the setting up a spiral of improvement. Quality thus is never fully achieved but is a constant aspiration and challenge. There is always something more to be done.

How can quality be developed?

The recent priority accorded to developing quality across the diversity of early childhood settings in the UK has spawned a growing number of 'quality' initiatives. Some of these initiatives have a clear focus on measuring or assessing quality as part of a policy for quality inspection or assurance. Examples of these include the British Standards BS 5750 or BSEN/ISO 9000 Scheme (BSI, 1991), the OFSTED Inspection Framework (1993) and the PLA

Accreditation Procedures (PPA, 1993). Other initiatives are geared towards quality improvement or total quality management, developed as part of a providers commitment towards raising standards in their provision. Examples of the latter include the Thomas Coram Self Evaluation Materials (Mooney et al., 1994), the Strathclyde, *Evaluating Ourselves Project* (Wilkinson and Stephen, 1992) and the Effective Early Learning Project (Pascal, Bertram and Ramsden, 1994a, Pascal et al.,1995). A useful topology and critique of these various approaches can be found in William's evaluation of approaches to quality in early childhood services (Williams, 1995). All of these schemes build upon the established consensus of the key elements of quality provision (DES, 1990, DoH, 1991), and each has an expressed commitment to raising standards in early childhood provision. In the rest of this chapter we shall draw on the experience of these approaches to identify some key issues faced by those concerned with developing future strategies for quality improvement in early childhood services.

It seems astonishing given the current plethora of school improvement and school effectiveness schemes that, to date, there has been virtually nothing developed with a clear focus on improving the educational experience of children in under-fives settings. This is despite the wealth of evidence pointing to the period of birth to five as being perhaps the most critical stage in a child's learning career. The lack of action was pointed out powerfully by Sir Christopher Ball in the RSA Start Right Report (Ball 1994) when he stated.

> *"The diverse pattern of provision in the UK...makes it difficult to ascertain and monitor the quality of learning experiences offered to young children. There is a lack of thorough and systematic quality review, and a need for appropriate and rigorous procedures for quality development and assurance for all centre based learning. One of the purposes of a national evaluation of the diversity of provision would be to enable parents to make informed choices. At present, there are no incentives to encourage the evaluation of quality and the pursuit of strategies of improvement."*
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> *(Ball, 1994, para. 6.12)*

Since this Report was published in March 1994, schemes to improve the quality of learning in early childhood settings have begun to have a profile and an impact. Looking across some of the current initiatives and referring, in

particular, to the Effective Early Learning Project, we can draw out some key issues to be addressed by those planning strategies for quality improvement.

The need for urgent action is clear, and we in early childhood education should not fall into the trap of feeling we have to start from scratch in our search for effective improvement strategies. There is much experience we can draw upon, and a growing wealth of literature on School Improvement, School Effectiveness and the wider field of Total Quality Management. There is also much in this literature to reassure us that improvement need not be a threatening process but can be achieved in a positive, empowering way. Looking across the literature we have found substantial agreement as to the strategies which appear to facilitate effective quality improvement and those which do not (Hopkins, 1986 & 1992; Louis and Miles, 1991; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992; Goddard and Leask, 1992; Scheerens, 1992; West-Burnham, 1992; Murgatroyd and Morgan, 1993; Sallis, 1993; Handy, 1994). These common strategies reveal that:

- judgments about quality need to be made,
- an outside perspective is required but that the assessed and the assessor know and trust each other,
- evaluation should emerge from an open, honest and collaborative dialogue using a shared vocabulary,
- this dialogue should be generated over an extended period of time,
- the dialogue needs a clear, systematic, agreed framework and format,
- the evidence for evaluation is gathered together and shared together,
- the evaluation process should lead to action plans,
- the action should be followed through, supported and monitored,
- the settings should take ownership of the process and its outcomes,
- all participants in the process should be encouraged to make a contribution which is acknowledged and valued.

- compulsion and hierarchies do not work. Collaboration and participation do.

These common characteristics of effective quality improvement provide a sound basis from which to plan further action in the field of early childhood. This consensus, and the experience of four years development work on the Effective Early Learning Project, have convinced us that any quality improvement process for early childhood should adhere to the following six principles of action.

1. Adopting a dynamic, developmental approach which views the processes of evaluation and improvement as inseparable.

2. Utilising procedures which are shared, democratic and collaborative.

3. Implementing a bottom up process which is opted into and not imposed.

4. Creating a rigorous, systematic and agreed evaluative framework which is implemented over an extended period of time.

5. Ensuring the action is supported and has outcomes which are monitored.

6. Aiming to develop a process which empowers and develops practitioners, parents and children.

Each of these six principles throw up a key issue which has to be addressed by those who are looking ahead to future development. All the current approaches to quality in early childhood have had to tackle these six issues, some managing it more successfully than others.

Issue 1: Adopting a developmental approach

Williams (1995) makes the distinction between approaches to quality which are dynamic and those which are static. Dynamic approaches are concerned with a more developmental, incremental approach to quality improvement. They focus their attention on aspects of practice which can and should be subject to on-going development and the processes by which this development might be brought about. Static approaches are more concerned with putting into place

mechanisms for achieving a fixed, predetermined and defined standard of quality. They focus their attention on the systems and procedures which will ensure an organisation is able to achieve a defined standard i.e. the capability to deliver, rather than exploring the actuality of whether these standards are achieved or not i.e. the actual performance.

We have already stated our belief that quality is *"a dynamic concept which varies with time and place"* (Pascal and Bertram, 1994b). It follows, therefore, that we feel it would be inappropriate to lay down fixed, static, predetermined definitions of quality. We have found that if any organisation is to succeed consistently, and over time, it must put into place procedures and processes of quality evaluation and improvement which are a permanent and normal part of its ongoing professional activity. To view quality as some kind of magic threshold over which a setting may cross, collecting a kite mark of quality on the way, and then settle back content would be, in our view, a grave mistake. Rather, quality should be viewed as something to be pursued by all providers and practitioners at every step in their career, in a positive, developmental and absolutely professional manner.

We have found this developmental approach to quality to be very helpful in motivating practitioners and providers who have been involved in the Effective Early Learning Project. Working in widely different early childhood contexts, it would have been extremely difficult to impose on everyone a fixed, tightly defined, set of quality standards towards which they should all work. Some of our settings would have found the demands of this totally overwhelming and would have been threatened and disempowered by the whole process. Others would have found these quality standards to be totally irrelevant as guidance for the future development of the high quality provision they were already achieving, and they would have been demeaned by the process. Added to this was our awareness that to impose a fixed, static set of quality standards might have led to the impression that once these had been achieved, and acknowledged, then there was little more to be done. In fact, some of our most developed settings set themselves even greater challenges in their commitment towards 'improving on their previous best'.

A further mechanism to facilitate the kind of ongoing, developmental commitment we were trying to put in place was the intertwining of the processes of evaluation and improvement so that they had to be viewed as inseparable. In the Effective Early Learning Project, the procedures for

gathering evidence and making judgments about what this evidence revealed, are inextricably linked by both personnel and techniques, to the action required for quality improvement. We believe that separating out these two processes leads to the dangerous allegation that the judgments made are inappropriate, lacking in credibility and limited in their understanding of the context. We can also empathise with teams of practitioners who refuse to comply with the suggested diagnosis of an evaluative process in which they have played no part. Experience has shown that separating evaluation from improvement is fatally flawed.

Issue 2: Utilising a democratic approach

Given our stated belief that assessing and improving quality is a subjective and value-laden enterprise, it therefore follows that any process for achieving this must embrace this notion at its heart. It must facilitate and encourage the expression of the values, preferences and opinions of all those who play a part in the life of the setting. Involving the so-called 'stake holders' (Moss and Pence, 1994) in the quality evaluation and improvement process is an idea that we concur with wholeheartedly in terms of meaning, if not in terms of semantics. Adopting a 'democratic' approach requires that all those who have a close involvement in the early childhood setting should be invited to play a part in the development process. This means involving managers, practitioners, parents and, importantly, children. In this sense, the whole process should be something which is 'done with' the participants, rather than 'done to' them.

This approach coheres with the views of Pfeffer and Coote (1991) who critiqued the existing 'traditional', 'scientific', 'managerial' and 'consumerist' approaches to quality which are generally utilised in the welfare services. They argue that each of these approaches fail because they do not acknowledge the important distinction between commerce and welfare. Alternatively, they propose a 'democratic' approach which recognises the central importance of providing equity in services and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity for expressing their needs and preferences. We support this approach strongly, both philosophically and professionally. It acknowledges and celebrates the subjectivity of defining quality as an empowering and strengthening process.

In the Effective Early Learning Project we have tried to ensure that quality is defined by the shared reflections and agreement of experienced managers,

practitioners, parents and children. The definition is validated and scrutinised for accuracy by those closest to the experience that is being evaluated. The Project is therefore firmly founded in democratic principles and we have worked hard at putting in to place a process which depends on partnership, collaboration and teamwork, (although we might discuss at some length the distribution of power within these relationships). Our philosophical commitment to this approach was reinforced with the hope that it would also enable the individual settings to become more responsive, more fitted for their purpose and able to empower those within them.

Some recent quality initiatives have adopted a similar inclusive, collaborative approach (The Pre-school Playgroups Association, PLA, Accreditation Scheme, 1993 and the Strathclyde Project, 1994). Others have tended to view the process as being more effectively carried out by an external team of 'experts' who come into an early childhood setting and implement the quality evaluation process (the British Standards Scheme, 1991 and the OFSTED Inspection Scheme, 1993). We believe, however, that if ongoing quality improvement is viewed as part of a complex set of continuously evolving relationships between providers, children and their families, then it is crucial that approaches adopt a participative, collaborative mode of operation. For us, this is a key issue to be addressed by those concerned with developing quality. We have found that parents, children and practitioners need to be encouraged to work in a mutually open, honest and supportive partnership which is directed towards ensuring the highest quality of early learning experiences possible.

Issue 3: Implementing a bottom up process

Working with early childhood practitioners over many years has convinced us of their deep commitment to providing children with the best quality of early experiences possible. We have not found the need to coerce practitioners into improvement schemes as long as they feel it will help them practically to do a more effective job. In fact, we have found practitioners from all sectors actively seeking opportunities to become more skilful educators. The biggest complaint we hear is of the lack of available and appropriate professional development opportunities, and the difficulties they face in being able to take up what is available due to inadequate funding, limited time and the lack of access to expertise. We see time and again practitioners who are willing to give up their own time, energy and money to engage in a process of

professional development. The pool of enthusiasm and passion for improvement displayed by the staff who work with young children is notable and those who are developing quality schemes can only benefit from this. Experience across industry through Total Quality initiatives confirm our experience on the Effective Early Learning Project, and reinforce our belief that quality improvement is most effective and powerful when it is a bottom up process into which participants opt because they can see its relevance, rather than a top down, management imposed, directive.

However, this emphasis on quality schemes which are practitioner and provider owned and opted into, rather than centrally prescribed and imposed, does have a proviso. We believe strongly that all early childhood settings should be part of a nationally regulated and carefully monitored system of provision for young children, in which all providers are required to reach a baseline of quality before they are allowed to operate at all. Once the initial operating baseline is achieved, each provider should be encouraged to link into an ongoing scheme of quality evaluation and improvement as part of their commitment to establishing high standards across the sector.

Issue 4: Developing a systematic and rigorous evaluative framework

Any process of quality evaluation and improvement must have at its heart a clearly articulated framework on which to base its reflection and action. We have spoken of the growing consensus, which is well laid out in both DES (1990) and DoH (1991) publications. Looking across the spectrum of quality schemes there is a significant degree of overlap in the evaluative frameworks used. The OFSTED Framework, the PLA Accreditation Scheme, the Strathclyde Project and the Effective Early Learning Project all look at similar 'domains' or 'dimensions' of policy and practice. These dimensions generally include management procedures, policy, staffing, curriculum, physical environment, interpersonal relationships, ethos and home links. We have found that working from this agreed evaluative framework has been enormously helpful in ensuring a cohesive, coherent and comprehensive response to the quality movement. If each early childhood provider was to work to an individual evaluative framework, further fragmentation and disparity of quality within the system as a whole would follow. Yet, three key points need to be emphasised.

Firstly, to be effective any evaluative framework must be rigorous, systematic and based upon the best knowledge we have about effective teaching and learning in the early years. This will involve the development and utilisation of accessible and practicable techniques for gathering and analysing evidence on which to base the evaluation and the training of practitioners in employing them. At the heart of these techniques should be focused observations of adults and children within a setting, but they will also include a range of other qualitative and quantitative methods of gathering information. The model of practitioner as researcher should therefore be viewed as central to the quality improvement process.

Secondly, while the framework itself has to be robust and transferable, it also has to be flexible so that each element within it can be interpreted to meet the particular context in which it is being applied. The diverse range of early childhood settings within the UK, and the need for these to be responsive to the families and local community they serve, demands that there is room within any quality framework for it to be applied in a range of different ways. This flexibility should allow individual settings to offer parents real choice whilst reassuring them that the core elements of quality are being addressed.

Thirdly, all those participating in the evaluative process must be aware of this quality framework and agree on its validity and applicability to their particular context. Where dispute arises as to the relevance or appropriateness of any aspect of the framework, the effectiveness of the whole process is threatened. The evaluative framework being used must have credibility and acceptance amongst all members of the organisation which is being evaluated. This requires good communication, time for everyone to familiarise themselves with the framework, and opportunities for an open dialogue about it.

Experience has also taught us that a dip stick approach to quality evaluation and improvement severely limits its effectiveness. In order to obtain a comprehensive, truly representative and valid picture of the quality of provision in any one setting, which can be used as the basis for fundamental improvement which will have a lasting impact, a long term time frame has to be used. The Effective Early Learning Project's evaluation and development process takes between 6 to 9 months to go through just one cycle of focused development. Other schemes also have an extended time period for their implementation e.g. the Strathclyde Project took over 12 months and the PLA Scheme has no time limits. We have found it is important that the process of quality improvement is

not viewed as a short, sharp blast of activity which can be done periodically and then put on one side. Rather, we would promote a model of on going, professional activity directed at a constantly rolling cycle of evaluation and improvement. In this way short, medium and long term goals can be planned for, and worked at systematically, and at a pace which individual settings can manage within the normal ebbs and flows of their activity. We have found this to be not only pragmatic and realistic, but also motivating for those involved because they feel in control.

Issue 5: Monitoring and assessing the impact

The issue of monitoring and assessing the impact of any quality improvement strategy is one which must be considered carefully, for it is full of both pitfalls and potential. With limited resources it is important to have some evidence that any action undertaken has achieved what it set out to do. Accountability and value for money are part of the climate in which we are all working, but they only form part of the reason for focusing on this issue. Early childhood educators are primarily concerned with providing children with the early learning experiences that will lay a sound foundation for the child's future. To get this wrong at this stage will have far reaching consequences for individual children and for society at large. The central purpose of any improvement strategy, therefore, should be the enhancement of the quality of the teaching and learning processes offered, and it is therefore important that we have mechanisms which can assess this.

Unfortunately, assessing the quality of the processes that go on within any setting is a very tricky task. It is not easy to identify the constituent elements within a quality experience and to gather 'hard' evidence about changes in these. We are only just beginning to understand the subtle qualitative nuances, interpersonal relationships and factors which constitute effective teaching and learning at this stage, but it is clear that these are the critical factors in determining a quality education or not. As a result of this lack of well developed techniques, process measures do not seem to carry the same attraction to those who monitor quality in early childhood. Outcome measures which can provide tangible and often quantifiable evidence are often seen, mistakenly in our view, as preferable. This is despite the fact that the outcomes of educational inputs in these early stages may not be evident until the child reaches maturity.

Yet, we would be wrong to polarise the debate. It is important that we focus our attention on the development of measures to assess the impact of any programme of professional improvement within a setting. Some of these impact measures may focus on educational outcomes and these would include a child's social competence, emotional well being, behavioural characteristics, linguistic skills, mathematical competencies, amongst them. Given, however, the emphasis placed upon learning processes at this stage (DES, 1990), we urgently need to develop impact measures which provide reliable and accessible evidence of the quality of these processes. These measures are beginning to emerge and to be utilised within quality improvement schemes. For example, the Effective Early Learning Project has worked with Professor Ferre Laevers to develop two observational assessment techniques which aim to measure quantitatively the quality of the learning and teaching processes. The Involvement Scale (Laevers, 1994) focuses on the quality of the learning process and the Engagement Scale (Bertram, 1995) focuses on the quality of the teaching process. These two structured observational techniques are manageable and accessible and have provided invaluable evidence to practitioners, providers and consumers, which may be used diagnostically and evaluatively to monitor developments in quality over time and to make comparisons. More work clearly needs to be done in this important area in developing assessment techniques, but also in convincing decision makers of the validity and reliability of such process measures. It is interesting to note that amongst the quality schemes currently available to early childhood providers, few are really addressing the issue of monitoring the impact of improvements on the quality of teaching and learning at all.

Issue 6: Aiming for empowerment

Despite a developing national profile and the increasing acceptance of the importance of early childhood, those who work with young children continue to suffer from low status, a lack of professional acknowledgement and the perception that their work is less valuable than those who work with older children (DES, 1990; Pascal, 1993; National Commission Report, 1993; RSA Report, 1994). The effect of this is felt throughout the system and at all levels and so any long term strategy to improve quality in early childhood has got to tackle this issue vigorously. In a competitive world, resources generally follow status, visibility and power and we in early childhood do badly on all these counts. It would also be disingenuous for us to pretend that any substantial

improvement in the quality of provision for young children could be achieved without tackling the broader social and political context in which such provision is set. At present, despite a number of recent reports which have protested against the inequity in the funding directed at the education and care of young children, a substantial shift of resources in favour of early learning has not been achieved (DES, 1990; National Commission Report, 1993; RSA Report, 1994; Houses of Commons, 1994b).

We need to continue to campaign nationally and locally for this shift, but underpinning all of this should be a strategy which aims to enhance the professional competence, confidence and assertiveness of early childhood educators. This must feed into all initial and in service training, but can also be greatly facilitated through the development of approaches to quality improvement which celebrate and empower the practitioners themselves. We have found through the Effective Early Learning Project that our strategy of acknowledging the skills and expertise of those who work with young children, giving them the responsibility for taking their practice on and supporting them in this process, has had a tremendously empowering effect on those with whom we have worked. It has helped them become clearer and more articulate about their practice and their requirements for putting into place high quality early learning experiences for the children in their care. It has also given them the confidence and the evidence to start asserting their needs to the decision makers who oversee their work. It is this that gives us most cause for optimism in the future. At last we are beginning to realise the importance of our work in early childhood and to have high expectations of those who should be supporting us in carrying it out.

In conclusion

Putting in place high quality early learning experiences which are available for all children will not be achieved overnight, and nor will it come cheap. Substantial investment in quality provision for young children is urgently needed and long overdue. We have to be absolutely clear, as limited resources are made available to us, how these might most effectively be used, what kind of quality provision we are aiming to put in place and what the first steps are in achieving this. We must also make sure that we do not lose the small gains in quality we have made in the current rush to expand provision quickly and at

the least possible cost. The question of quality in early childhood is a crucial one and one which we cannot afford to get wrong.

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Integration: children of all abilities working together in an inclusive classroom

by Shannon Lee Fletcher

What is integration?

Integration is a strategy that provides opportunities for children with special educational needs (SEN) to learn in regular classes in neighbourhood schools with peers who do not have learning difficulties or special needs.

What is an 'inclusive classroom'?

The 'inclusive classroom' is a regular school classroom where children of all abilities are welcomed, accepted and valued. Children learn to work together in a cohesive, supportive learning community. Each child is accepted as a unique individual whose individual needs are planned for. Every child's contribution to the class no matter how small is valued. Each step of learning progress is cheered and celebrated.

Now that we have working definitions of both integration and an integrated classroom, the questions begin. I hope to make the advantages of integrating children with SEN into an inclusive classroom clearer by first of all presenting a case study.

TLG-123: The development of a multi-aged, teaching-learning, inclusive community

This case study gives an account of how one group of early childhood educators built an inclusive community. We chose the name Teaching Learning Group One, Two, Three (TLG 123) to indicate the multi-age teaching learning community we were striving to build.

As I began planning for the next school year, I was searching for a more effective way of providing an educational programme for my children with very high needs. Through the past year I had gradually increased the time the children were in the regular classrooms, but was that time productive and did it provide meaningful opportunities for interaction? I was also wanting to set up an organisational structure that would facilitate increased teacher communication and more connected learning for the children.

Within my school there was a group of classroom teachers who were going to team together to build a learning community including children from grades one to three. As all of my high needs children were in grades one to three, I wrote a proposal to include my high needs children in the group. The proposal included my beliefs about how children learn, the advantages for all the children and teachers, some organisational approaches and implementation ideas.

I approached each of the teachers in the team separately and asked them to read the proposal and consider including the high needs children and me in their teaching-learning group. This team also included a special education teacher who would give support to children with mild learning disabilities. These teachers were very welcoming. What has happened in the year following this proposal has exceeded my expectations and I would like to share what has become an exciting learning adventure.

Planning

We began in May by asking for administrative approval and support. We asked for classrooms physically close to each other. We asked for scheduling considerations which included opportunities to use the whole gymnasium and the music room for large group instruction. To facilitate the inclusion of children with SEN, we needed adequate assistant support and the ability to do flexible and creative scheduling of assistant hours. We wanted special needs children of all abilities particularly those with moderate and mild needs to receive support in the regular classroom setting rather than being segregated.

Our team planning, which included three regular education teachers and two special education teachers, began by choosing themes. Year plans were begun in June and written over the summer. Regular classroom teachers were provided with background information and modification strategies to facilitate the effective participation of the high needs children.

Implementation

1. All the children participated in a daily opening activity that enhanced the theme, provided group academic instruction and sharing opportunities.

2. All the children participated in learning centres based on the theme activities. During this time the children were divided into sixteen consistent multi-age learning groups. Four learning groups participated in the centres in each of the four classrooms (including the special needs classroom).

3. A TLG chant was written and a TLG song chosen and used daily.

4. All the children participated in large group activities that increased the building of community and provide connected learning activities. These activities included theme, music, and literature presentations. Frequently children were involved in choosing the literature selections chosen for these large group activities.

5. All the children participated in physical education at the same time. Some physical education units were organised by using a whole group opening and then a series of centres. This was done for gymnastics themes, Canada fitness, and inside and outside games. Other units were carried out in two multi-age groupings.

6. All the children participated in similar art activities connected to the learning theme and to the development of specific skills. Art was sometimes presented in large group and then the children divided into smaller groups to complete the activity.

7. The children participated in multi-aged reader's workshops. Special needs children were accommodated well within this learning structure. Some very high needs children also participated with peer or adult assistance. A special education teacher gave support to the children with mild learning difficulties in the classroom during this time.

8. The children participated in multi-aged writers workshops. SEN children were accommodated with this learning structure as well.

Additional support was provided by a special education teacher during this time also.

9 High needs children had daily learning partners who volunteered to be that child's partner for the day. They would join their partner for regular classroom activities, physical education activities and would also participate in a short learning activity in the special education setting.

Results

- **All children have interacted with many peers and adults and learned to accept each individual's abilities and contributions.**
- **Adults and children feel confident and valued by belonging to a supportive learning community. Children have learned to assist and support each other.**
- **Effective communication and regular planning for all children occur between classroom teachers and special education teacher.**
- **Learning for all children is continuous and connected.**
- **Children with SEN have increased social skills, developed friendships and learned to follow classroom routines.**
- **Classroom teachers have become very comfortable and capable of modifying activities and teaching special needs children.**
- **Children have developed an increased interest in literature and in the reading and writing progress. High needs children have also demonstrated increased interest in books.**
- **Specific individual needs of children have been more fully met.**
- **A more authentic assessment system has been developed by using portfolios to demonstrate the progress of each child.**
- **We have moved towards more child-centred learning and self-evaluation by including self-chosen work samples in the portfolio; by**

children setting their own learning goals, evaluating their own learning and conducting the progress interviews with their parents.

My participation in TLG-123 strengthened my beliefs about learning and increased my resolve to teach, learn and act in accordance with those beliefs. I know that I have grown professionally and personally as a teacher and as a learner. Thank you to a teaching team who have shared their expertise and given me support. Thank you to a group of diverse children who have demanded expertise in teaching and have exemplified enthusiastic learning.

Through participation in TLG-123 my special needs children have received the opportunities necessary for them to demonstrate significant progress in learning and to increase the quality and fullness of each of their lives.

Making Room

During the next school year, my role in the TLG--123 changed. I became a regular classroom teacher instead of a special education teacher within the team. I would now have the opportunity and the responsibility of building an inclusive supportive classroom that included all children. I had always wondered if my expectations for including all children, from gifted to those with severely high needs and providing optimum opportunity for their unique needs, was unrealistic. Now was my opportunity to practise what I believed.

Planning

We met in the spring of 1992 as a teaching team that included the classroom teachers and special education teachers to prepare for the next school year. We renewed our commitment to TLG by reviewing our beliefs and policies. We also planned some additional strategies to increase educational learning and build the feeling of community. As a team we took the opportunity to attend a week long workshop on co-operative learning. We were hoping to learn more strategies to promote effective learning and increase our use of strategies to build an inclusive community. We wanted to teach children to accept and respect each other and to value each other's contributions.

We decided to implement some consistent classroom routines and activities that would increase self esteem and model valuing. We continued our 'Celebrate With Us' bulletin board where every child had the opportunity to put up a display about him/herself. We began a Celebration Board where children could write notes of appreciation to classmates. We, as teachers, modelled this

activity by writing a note to every student each week identifying their accomplishments and strengths. We continued to have a weekly planning meeting to plan learning centres, physical education activities, field trips, special presentations, assessment strategies.

Implementation

Because of our commitment to provide optimum learning opportunities for children in a supportive, inclusive community, we implemented twenty eight strategies, structures, activities and routines (see appendix for listing).

Discussion

The case study raises a number of further questions for consideration.

Do children with special educational needs who are included in an inclusive classroom have the opportunity to develop their full potential?

Research has shown that most children's development increases through integration. Including SEN children in the classroom often provides them opportunities provided to all children in that classroom plus extra support and assistance built into the regular classroom routine. Each child should progress along their own continuum of learning supported by an inclusive learning community. The inclusive classroom supports continuity provides strategies that accept and utilise individual differences.

Does integration limit the rights of other children?

It has been demonstrated that other children, especially young children, quickly learn to accept and understand children who have different needs. As special needs children become perceived as part of their school community, other children learn to be caring and supportive. An inclusive classroom stresses the building of a supportive and co-operative learning community.

Does the inclusion of SEN children mean reduced teacher support for other children?

No, not if the special needs child has been appropriately placed and has his/her programme planned and implemented with the support and resources needed in

place. Teaching strategies and classroom organisations should support personalised education for all children as needed. Often a 'regular' child can benefit from extra support provided to a classroom for a special needs child.

Do special needs children who are included in regular classrooms lose access to specialised, personal resources?

Children who have SEN must be given support according to their own unique needs. It is possible in most cases to provide these services within the regular classroom setting. After careful consideration of the individual's needs one or a combination of the following supports should be provided.

- A special education teacher who provides consultation, programming, and appropriate teaching strategies.
- Specialised materials and resource information.
- Community resources like speech therapists, physiotherapists and psychologists.
- Instructional assistants.
- Teacher training for regular classroom teachers.

In addition, it is prudent to evaluate all resources available and use them in creative combinations to provide the most effective programming for children.

What are the most effective ways of utilising the services provided by special needs teachers to enhance the integration process?

For every school this will be different. Every school must carefully consider the unique needs of their children and then consider the available personal resources and utilise their strengths. A combination of several implementation methods is usually needed to enable the building of successful inclusive school communities. The following are some ways to utilise special needs teachers to facilitate continuity in learning and inclusive classrooms.

a) Special needs teachers provide consultation and assessment

b) Special needs teachers facilitate the co-operative development of individual education programmes

c) Special needs teachers assist with programme planning and modification

d) Special needs teachers provide in class instruction through team teaching and small group or individual instruction

e) Special needs teacher can provide in-service for other teachers, instructional assistants and parents

f) Special needs teachers provide information on available community resources

Early childhood educational beliefs that support integration and the building of inclusive classrooms

This section will explore the connections between early childhood education beliefs and the integration of children with SEN. The fundamental beliefs that drive the practices of early childhood education and the building of inclusive classrooms are not only compatible but are enabling and supportive of each other.

1. **Learning is continuous.** Proponents of both practices believe that all children have a right to learning experiences that provide for an uninterrupted continuum of progress and that enhance individual development.

2. One of the main philosophies in building an inclusive classroom is: **Teachers establish a community of learners while respecting the individual.** Both early childhood educators and those practising the philosophy of the 'inclusive classroom' welcome and include all children in the learning activities, routines and social life of the classroom.

3. Each child has the right to learn in a secure environment that **promotes positive self-esteem and self-concept**. Each child's abilities, contributions and progress are valued and celebrated.

4. Both early childhood educators and proponents of inclusive classrooms believe **Children learn with and from peers**. All teachers who facilitate the inclusion of SEN children have learned the importance and value of peer teaching, peer modelling, buddy systems and learning partners.

5. **Many early childhood teaching strategies are based on the assumption that children are active, inquisitive learners.** All children, especially children with special educational needs, learn effectively by participating in stimulating, concrete and multi-sensory experiences. Both philosophies concur that participation in a large variety of creative experiences and interacting with many different peers and teachers will provide a motivating and exciting learning environment.

6. Early childhood educators **promote the active role of parents in each child's education.**

7. Special educators believe that **parents must be consulted** regarding the educational placement of their child and should be actively involved in programming decisions.

8. **All learners, children and teachers, actively seek connections.** Connections from the past to the present, to future experiences, connections between home, school and the community, connections across subject curriculum. Each learner creates personal meaning through making connections. Special educationalists have long understood the importance of functional and connected learning.

9. **Assessment is primarily carried out to help children in their learning.** It documents the progress of the learner and guides planning for the future.

The evaluation of an individual's development, instead of comparing the child to a set standard of achievement, allows a comprehensive assessment technique that is useful for all children. Early childhood educators believe in authentic

assessment and have long used observation, anecdotal records and children's work samples as assessment vehicles. The use of portfolio assessments are effective for learners of all abilities. Teachers of children with high needs may need to be creative and innovative when developing the child's portfolio. Central to both perspectives is the view that continuity between assessment and learning experiences is essential to authentic assessment.

Now that the connections between early childhood education, the integration of special needs children and the role of the inclusive classroom are established, this chapter seeks to answer to the most important question. How to build an inclusive classroom that supports children of all abilities, particularly those with SEN?

Characteristics of schools that provide for integration and the establishment of inclusive schools

Schools which successfully provide for the integration of children with SEN through developing an inclusive school community have the following common characteristics:

1. **A mission statement that supports inclusiveness and continuity**
These schools have gone through a change process that has resulted in an articulate mission statement that encompasses the needs of all children and reflects the beliefs and values of the school community.

2. **Use of teaming approaches**
These schools use a variety of teaming approaches to fulfil many needs. Teams provide all parties with a support network. Teams are a powerful tool for problem solving. They provide a means of using the resources and expertise of many. Teams involve parents in a meaningful way. They provide for shared responsibility and increased commitment. Teams provide more holistic and connected learning for all children.

3. **Changes in the role of professionals**
Administrators support collaborative teams and address in-service needs related to improving teaming skills. Administrators share decision making power with teams so decisions become more child-centred and the commitment of all parties increases. Teachers move from teacher specialists working in

isolation to teacher generalists working in teams. Teachers participate in team planning and team teaching. Teachers provide support, share responsibility, and exchange expertise.

4. **Changes in the role of parents**
All parents are welcomed as partners in the teaching-learning process and participate in the school community in a variety of ways; they are welcomed as an equal member of a team of school professionals working in behalf of their children; they develop ongoing relationships with teachers. They become more committed to their children's educational programmes.

Organisational structures that provide for integration and the establishment of inclusive classrooms.

While there is no one perfect organisational structure that facilitates the integration of special needs children and the building of inclusive classrooms, there are many that are supportive to the practice of both. By considering the individual needs of all children and the available resources both human and material, an organisational framework can be constructed using a combination of structures.

The following are key considerations when developing an organisational framework.

- needs of the children in all developmental areas
- professional training and attitudes of teachers
- availability of support personnel, resource specialists and instructional assistants
- physical environment

1. **Team planning:** This provides communication between regular classroom teachers, specialist teachers and instructional assistants. It promotes opportunities for continuity within the programming for children with SEN and allows opportunities to share expertise. Good communication increases the opportunity to discuss and verify children's development and then plan programming changes according to that development.

2. **Team teaching:** This allows the children to benefit from the expertise of two or more professionals. It also provides opportunities for more individual and small group instruction while including children with SEN in the regular classroom activities.

3. **Multi-aged grouping:** Children and teachers have the advantage of an extended time together to provide for continuous progress from year to year. This structure involved children of many varied abilities learning together assisting and supporting each other. Children with SEN easily fit into this large continuum of progress.

4. **Consultative teams:** The consultative team provides a team of professionals with a variety of abilities and resources to programme for the special needs of children. Each special needs child should have a stable programme co-ordinator that provides the continuity for that child's programme. This team would include parents, classroom teacher, specialist teacher, programme co-ordinator and others involved with that child (i.e. instructional assistant, community resource specialists).

5. **Scheduling:** Integration is enhanced by flexible scheduling that allows flexible cross-grade grouping, implementation of special projects, learning centres and subject area integration and time for children to plan, engage in, respond and reflect on learning experiences. This provides also for more connected, meaningful learning for special needs children.

Strategies that provide for classroom inclusiveness and are compatible with early childhood educational practises.

Classroom strategies that focus on the process of learning and not on the product are more enabling for young children, integration and classroom inclusiveness.

1. Co-operative learning

Children of all abilities can work together to become a valued member of a learning community. Children learn to assist, support and co-operate together. Volunteer learning partners, who choose to work together with a child that has special needs, provide an effective way of involving both children in learning.

Young children grow immensely from participating in co-operative learning groups. When a classroom of children first come together they should be given as many opportunities to participate in paired activities with a variety of different partners. Objectives, roles and conduct guidelines must be clearly stated. After working together in this way the children may become part of a larger co-operative group. These children should be of varying abilities and remain working together for several projects and activities. They will learn academic, social and organisational skills from the group members. Academic achievement of these groups usually surpasses what individuals could produce.

For example, three six and seven-year-old boys researched and wrote a book about whales, complete with illustrations and clay models. One of these children had autistic tendencies that effected both his communication and fine motor abilities. The co-operative task benefited the child greatly. The encouragement and example of his peers increased his frequency of speech and developed more appropriate language patterns and social skills.

2. Peer modelling

Children learn by modelling the behaviour of their peers. The regular classroom setting provides many opportunities for children with special educational needs to model appropriate learning practices, classroom routines, and social behaviours of their peers. Through the modelling of his peers, I watched a young child who was severely intellectually and physically disadvantaged learn simple hoop handling skills during a physical education class.

3. Theme studies

The use of themes provides important connections in learning across the curriculum. During theme studies, individuals or groups of children may work on more or less difficult projects according to their abilities. Theme studies create a feeling of inclusiveness and community purpose.

4. Learning centres

Learning centres provide opportunities for children to participate in creative learning experiences. Children have opportunities to make choices and direct their own learning. Often centres provide opportunities to discover new concepts through concrete manipulatives or multi-sensory activities. Learning centre activities are an excellent way of providing motivating learning experiences for children with varied abilities.

5. Language learning strategies

The teaching and learning strategies that have been developed and are currently being used to implement language learning, encourage the inclusion of SEN children. The following are some of these strategies:

- Reader's Workshop - this provides a wide variety of choice of literature at different ability levels.
- Writer's Workshop - all young children progress through natural writing stages. Each step of progress for each child is valued and celebrated, whether the child has produced beginning representative letters, single words, phrases, sentences or a full story.
- Response Journals and Learning Logs - each child explains what he/she has learned through participation in a learning experience.
- Individual children's conferences.
- Mini lessons for specific needs.
- Learning logs.
- Book sharing.
  - -teacher read selections.
  - -dramatisation.
  - -chanting.

6. Processed-based programmes in mathematics and science

Programmes that develop understanding of new concepts by relating these new concepts to children's current knowledge and every day experiences assist them in making connections. Maths manipulative programmes use concrete objects and experience to teach concepts.

7. Portfolio assessment

Portfolios provide for the tracking of individual learning progress regardless of the ability of the child. They demonstrate in a clear, natural way the child's progress, including each step of achievement. Portfolios facilitate self evaluation and provide opportunities for self directed learning. Items that may be included in a portfolio:

a) Photographs
b) Personal information on the uniqueness of the child
c) Work samples
d) Video
e) Anecdotal records
f) Table of contents

g) Home journal
h) Response journal
i) Children's self-evaluation

8. Development of individual education plans (IEP) for special needs children

Parents, children, classroom teachers and specialist teachers need to work together to develop the IEP. Involvement in IEP development increases the commitment of all involved to provide for the implementation. When both the regular classroom teacher and the specialist teacher know the goals and the resources available, implementation is enhanced.

The classroom teacher can provide opportunities for the student to participate in activities that meet the stated goals. Programme modifications can be discussed and implemented. Modifications are achieved through a change in performance expectations, through the use of adaptive materials and through using a variety of presentation strategies.

All personnel involved in the development of the IEP should be involved in reviewing the child's progress and modify the plan according to the child's changing needs.

9. Use of instructional assistants

Instructional assistants provide for the inclusion of SEN children in classroom activities that a child cannot independently participate in. Under the direction of the teacher, instructional assistants can prepare modified materials, assist with child interaction, provide help with children's work, communicate child observations to the teacher and maintain brief anecdotal records.

Conclusion

I had the wonderful opportunity of watching a young autistic child with severe language and motor disabilities become an integral part of our classroom and TLG community. After attending his case conference, consulting with parents and educational specialists, we decided he would be a full participant of a regular grade one programme. Supports were built into the classroom to provide assistance according to his unique needs.

He had the support of a part-time instructional assistant and had the opportunity to receive individualised instruction and access to a computer. We provided a consistent and safe learning environment. He changed from a child who would not look, touch or talk to his peers, to a child who initiated conversations and greeted friends with a hug. He went from a child who ritualistically paced the playground, to a child who played four square and wall ball with his friends. He went from a child who would not speak in front of the class, to a child who eagerly shared his research report with the class. He was a contributing member of a co-operative learning base group. He taught caring and respect to an aggressive classmate.

I also had the challenge of providing educational programmmes for five children who were having mild learning difficulties. Support for these children was provided by the special education teacher on our team. She provided formal assessments. Individual education plans were planned and written together. We decided upon several strategies that would provide these children with successful learning opportunities. The special educator worked within the classroom providing one to one and small group instruction. She provided us with daily anecdotal records of success and concerns. As a TLG team, we divided the children of the three classrooms into four groups for Writers' Workshop and learning centres. This way all the children received instruction in smaller groups. Children who were not identified as SEN children had the benefit of the special education teacher's experience and expertise. The special education teacher also took small groups and individuals out of the classroom into a less distractible environment if this was the most beneficial for the children's needs.

I have also learned that instructional assistants are a wonderful resource. I planned weekly with the assistant who worked in my classroom which gave her advance information on upcoming activities and themes. I was also able to teach her strategies to use with children. I developed some individual programmes for children and modelled implementation and recording procedures.

Parents provided additional support through at home reading programmes and in class assistance. I had several faithful parents who came regularly. One mum never missed a Wednesday afternoon.

My class this year also included two children who were gifted in language learning. By using strategies such as Reader's Workshops, Writer's Workshops, literature circles and research projects, these children were encourage to stretch their limits. Multi-age grouping provided peer tutoring opportunities for children of all abilities to learn from each other.

By using a process-based mathematics programme which was built around the use of manipulatives it was easy to include two or three levels of a skill in an activity tray. Also by working within a multi-age team, children could be provided with the instruction they needed. One of my gifted children usually worked on more advanced skills with older children. This really challenged him and boosted his self-confidence.

Children learned to enjoy each other and to accept and appreciate each other's differences. Every child had received the opportunity to participate in optimum learning experiences and each child demonstrated academic progress. Two children with identified learning difficulties achieved grade level standards. Other children with learning difficulties did achieve more than a year's rate of progress (identified by standardised testing) even though they did not meet grade level standards.

Many children achieved beyond their grade level in language learning and mathematics. Children felt that they belonged to a school community and are excited to continue to be part of the TLG 123 community next year.

I appreciate the opportunity that I have had to help build a caring and supportive learning community. It has been a richly rewarding experience to watch children of all abilities learn and grow together. In the past, I have thought of myself as an advocate for children with special educational needs. Now I am an advocate for all children. It is exciting to be part of a supportive professional educational team. I appreciate the expertise and dedication of my colleagues. When a child enters my classroom door and asks "Is there room for me?" The answer is a resounding "YES". I look with eagerness to the challenge of tomorrow's children.

Appendix
Suggested 'ways forward'

1. Multi-age learning groups of children (eg. in grades one, two and three)
2. Multi-age Reader's Workshops
3. Multi-age Writer's Workshops
4. Co-operative learning
    - -base support learning groups of three
    - -learning centre groups
    - -ad hoc groups
5. At home reading programs
6. Literature based reading programs
7. Learning centres
8. Field trips
9. Maths trays using manipulatives
10. Team Planning
11. Team Teaching
12. Portfolios including:
    - -all about me section
    - -work samples selected by the children and/or teacher accompanied by a written reflection
    - -lists of books they have read
    - -lists of writing they have published
    - -audio cassette of their reading
    - -journals
    - -reading and writing surveys
    - -individual program plan/goal setting sheets
13. Themes/topics
14. Inclusion of special needs children
15. Development of an inclusive learning community
    - -weekly large group instruction
    - -centre groups
    - -multi-age physical education groups
    - -TLG chant
    - -TLG song
16. 'Celebrate With Us' Bulletin Board
17. Celebration chart
18. Weekly celebration

19. Child-directed conferences and goal setting with parents
20. Newsletters
21. Part in-service
22. Parent involvement
23. TLG 'Guest Book'
24. Reflection on their learning
25. Literature Circles
26. Readers' Theatre
27. Research projects
28. Author studies

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Initial teacher education

by Philip Gammage

Introduction and background

> *"In the flurry of reports there has been a noticeable absence of articulation about the role and nature of early childhood teacher education which reflects an assumption that early childhood personnel preparation mirrors elementary and secondary teacher education."*
>
> (Lewis et al., 1992, p.57)

The above quotation is taken from a relatively recent Australian paper. It shows that the assumptions of our government agencies, whilst deplorable, may be sadly by no means unique.

In the late 1990s it would appear that there is one dominant view of teaching (and learning) held by the 'responsible' government agencies. This view is one of telling children and of 'delivering' a curriculum to groups of largely passive recipients (Stones, 1992). How is it that such a view has come about and how does it fit with the perspectives held by the profession and by educational researchers?

This chapter seeks to discuss views of initial teacher education in general, but with particular regard to the work of those teaching children in the 'early years'. Moreover, it attempts to place the discussion in the context of values which hold education to be fundamentally different from indoctrination and which see teaching as an honourable form of essential negotiation between generations in a world where ambiguity and choice have to be faced honestly. It also reminds us that education is an intensely political process and that, in Britain especially, it is a process which represents something of that still-potent residue of class differences and conflicts which lie deep within the society. After all, at its simplest, a school is simply an organisation which is assigned the responsibility for encouraging teachers and children to commit themselves to learning. Ideally, it should, as Deming suggests, release the power of

intrinsic motivation and self esteem in order to further a joy of learning (Deming, 1986). One imagines that few would disagree with that, especially those concerned with early years education.

Too often the education of teachers has been portrayed as a 'one-off injection', something which has to equip a teacher for life, almost as though it inoculated the learner against all further learning! There has even been the danger of that view being prevalent in the profession itself from time-to-time. But the professional education of teachers is something which should be seen as a continuous and adaptive process, a process whereby certain skills (and even basic competencies) must be added to, expanded, enhanced and reflected upon and tested against theories of action. The author regards the debates about 'loony theory', fostered in some parts of the less reputable press, and even, at times, by ministers of education, as often wilfully unhelpful and largely sterile. Moreover, the perspectives taken in this chapter incorporate an assumption similar to that of Kurt Lewin's, that there is 'nothing as practical as a good theory', and sees theories of action and assumed consequence as central to professional knowledge and to the improvement of teaching itself.

Teachers are educated and 'trained' to some purpose. That purpose is, at its simplest, an education thought suitable for those officially designated nurturers of and planners for the expansion of children's minds and personalities. It implies a deeply moral process, that schooling should take place in an atmosphere of genuine concern for both the collective and individual freedoms commonly enshrined in the avowed beliefs and charters of civilised societies. It implies that those so educated and trained to be responsible for our children's education should themselves be constantly inquiring, growing, reflecting ... in short, life-long learners themselves. It may, of course, imply even more than that. For instance, it might be thought to imply that the education of children will take place in a culture and an atmosphere in which children are themselves valued and held dear; in short, in a culture which actually **LIKES** children.

Whilst the above may sound unexceptional, almost trite, it is clear that many do **NOT** see the business of teaching or of teacher education in quite that way. Teachers themselves are sometimes guilty of encouraging incoming new teachers to 'drop' certain forms of behaviour (presumably learned during initial teacher education) and to see the process of educating pupils as some form of

'trench warfare'! Often, too, the task may be seen as little more than that of passing on certain agreed or carefully defined information. Recent legislation, and certainly that concerning the National Curriculum in England and Wales, appears to present knowledge as a relatively agreed bundle of unassailable facts, such that, having 'set' the curriculum, teachers can then deliver it to their pupils, almost as though teachers were simply 'operatives', or transmitting stations and the children some group of well-tuned receivers. This process of passing on can then be tested at convenient points (ie. at grade levels, or, in England, at certain mythical - but legislated for - 'key stages') in order to ascertain the 'quality' of the simple output-input model. The testing can then be put to good uses, consonant with the modern industrial-commercial view of education, by comparing children, teachers, or whole schools as convenient units of analysis, or competitive 'products'. At worse, currently in England (1995), initial teacher education is regarded, by some, as a relatively short apprenticeship and the business of preparing teachers simply that of seeing that students model themselves on a practising teacher and demonstrate basic competencies sufficient to 'deliver' the national curriculum.

Arguments about how teachers might best be educated and trained are not new. As many writers of educational history have pointed out, tradition had it (in many societies) that at 'secondary' or moderately advanced levels of schooling, knowledge to degree level was an approximate guarantee of teaching ability. At primary/elementary levels, an apprenticeship might suffice, particularly if such teachers were then well controlled. At still earlier age levels of childhood nurture and control were so 'natural' that it was assumed any woman should be able cope, and even training then was hardly to be deemed necessary. (This is not fanciful comment and is not simply a quirk of long-forgotten times; a recent British minister of education proposed, in 1993, that 'an army of intelligent mums' would do for teaching children under eight years.)

Graves has contrasted what one might term the transmissive, or technicist and instrumental view of teaching, with that of a broader, 'cultural renewal' view. He has emphasised that there have always been questions of whether one is merely training teachers, or both *educating* and training them. He says that in recent years the Department For Education (in England) has stressed 'training' and hardly mentioned 'education', though, *"it has never made explicit why it has done so"* (Graves, 1995, p.5). The technicist, training perspective is one which often denies that there is anything more to the task besides that of

transmitting subject knowledge. It thus tends to devalue theories of pedagogy as 'woolly', or simply unnecessary. James (in 1901) was clear that an explicit and supportive relationship between practical skills and theory was essential if the business of teaching was to be professional and considered. His views are, to some extent echoed by many later writers, including those followers of Clarke, Morris, Schon, or of Deming, all of whom stress the reflective nature of good teaching and the importance of self-knowledge, interdependence and team work. There is, too, another aspect to all this. A teacher has a PROFESSION. Like medicine or law, it concerns perceptions and values. These, together with knowledge itself, are dynamic, changing facets of cultural life. During a career of, perhaps, forty years, the very fabric of society is likely to change, to transmute. Knowledge itself is dynamic. Even an agreed 'national curriculum' will need constant refining and up-dating.

Core principles

One might rehearse the arguments through many years, volumes and much research. The theory and practice of teaching is still a fairly hot issue (Sotto, 1994) and in some countries (not necessarily those classified as emerging nations or 'underdeveloped' ones) the battle for producing docile teachers or constructing 'top-down' models of desirable knowledge for them to transmit, ('delivered' is the oft-favoured official metaphor) are real and very serious. Nevertheless, in MOST countries of the 'developed' world, systems of teacher education and training exist which try to build the initial education of teachers around certain core principles and areas of knowledge; and these themselves imply the centrality of the child and perceptions of any curriculum as occasionally imperfect, negotiable and fluid. (It would seem fair to note that such core areas, distilled as they are from consensus, from research and from practical experience, genuinely seem *very similar* in many parts of the world and have applicability **in general** to preparation for all levels of teaching.)

As Evans points out (1992) the process of educating adults to take responsibility for teaching children requires decisions as to what counts as valid knowledge for both the children and their potential teachers. Moreover, the two perspectives are inseparable. But, as Elkind has emphasised, risks are great. Defining the knowledge tempts one to define the processes by which it SHOULD occur. KNOWLEDGE is much wider than the curriculum. It is

concerned with attitudes, dispositions and processes as well, about self-knowledge and responsibility. Of course, it is always tempting to measure certain limited (usually the more easily ascertained) knowledge outcomes as some assurance that teachers and children are doing their jobs. If so, one can then so easily miss the really important accompanying traits and dispositions which excite and encourage a permanently enquiring mind and which 'hook in' the children (Elkind, 1993). This is a constant theme of Lilian Katz (Katz, 1993, and 1995) and one which has important resonances through the last half century of writings on early childhood education. **High quality education of our young children may well be the result of their being placed alongside adults who provide organisations which encourage those key dispositions rather more than simply address basic 'subjects'**. Indeed, Sylva and others have shown quite convincingly that the type of nursery school and kindergarten experience the children have is critically related to the organisation and by implication to its staff and their attitudes and values (Sylva, 1994 and 1995). Despite all that, anyone familiar with teacher education in North America or the United Kingdom during the last thirty years or so would be well aware that cries concerning 'back to the basics', or the desirability of certain forms of school competition were concomitant with attacks on initial teacher education (Graves, op cit.).

In the middle of the twentieth century, it would have been fair to have described much of initial teacher education as 'under a system of tutelage'. Moreover, the young, early years teacher was invariably female and (usually) educated and trained in a monotechnic institution, that is one devoted solely to teacher education. For example, circa 1950 in England, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Australia, France, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, West Germany, much teacher education took place in second level institutions inferior to the universities and grandes ecoles and often under their direct (and sometimes 'licensed' or 'validated') patronage. There are still residues of such patronage in some countries; and certainly, even though most teacher education is now thoroughly embedded in universities, academic disdain for teacher education is still almost palpable. This may change as more and more countries insist on some minimal training for university academics themselves. The revolution in educational technology is already having an effect. Simply telling people what one already knows is now totally outmoded. Nevertheless, any change in the attitudes of academics towards pedagogy and andragogy will clearly take a long time; all the more so as universities

themselves come under pressure to produce instrumental, marketable research and are measured on **their** output, rather than on the satisfactions of students.

Early Years teachers, from about 1945, were usually 'certificated' or 'licensed' and in possession of a diploma rather than a full university degree. The licensing authorities varied. In some cases the license was issued by the training agency and endorsed by the ministry or department of education. In many cases the diploma was not easily tradable into another profession, and, even if hard-won and reasonably rigorous, likely to lack the prestige of a 'purer' discipline.

However complex the task of educating early years teachers may be (and we should recall that childhood itself is both changing and partly socially constructed), that consensus concerning initial teacher education is observable and seems to hold good for the period of childhood between about birth and eight years or so. It covers, or unifies, some ***eight*** broad areas.

1. **Knowledge about human development and human learning,** including some availability of courses which enhance self-knowledge. Models of human learning vary throughout the world (for instance, some countries, eg. Britain, have virtually abandoned work in psycho-dynamic theory, whereas other countries, such as France, Belgium or Germany, still see it as essential).
2. **Relatively high-level conceptual knowledge**, usually building on that attained at school graduation levels (say 18 years) and which develops the dispositions, knowledge and expertise of the student teacher (ie. a subject discipline).
3. **Knowledge of additional curriculum content areas** thought appropriate to the age and developmental stage of the child, together with an awareness of the resources and materials. (Aesthetics, arts and crafts seem very important to many countries, since it is thought that they in particular lend strength to meaningful play and enrich the quality of the child's life. Increasingly, technology is allied to these.)
4. **Ability to communicate effectively** and to understand the relevant theory and practice.
5. **Ability to manage and organise** groups of children so as to maximise their chances of learning; this including modes of observation,

appropriate evaluation, diagnostic assessment and patterns of working with other adults.

6. **Some knowledge of sociology**, cultural variability, social contexts, patterns of need and of deprivation. (Within this and 1. above are usually included some limited understanding of the range of variation and of 'special needs'.)
7. **Some concern with values clarification**, with principles, ideologies and beliefs.
8. **Regular and well-integrated field experience** (i.e. supervised practicuum in care, kindergarten and schools which build on burgeoning knowledge and confidence). There are marked differences between countries as to how much practical experience is necessary and how best this can be integrated with the course, the experiences of regular teachers and, sometimes, with that of ongoing research.

Another feature clearly associated with teaching ability is that aspect of the adult's personality (empathy, warmth, enjoyment in children's company) which makes an appropriate seedbed for many of those educational goals listed above. It is here, too, that there is often confusion, both in the 'public mind' and, unfortunately, among certain officials. For those features listed, if abundantly linked to intelligent awareness, sensitivity and reasonable scholarship, can OF THEMSELVES sometimes lead to effective teaching by those not formally qualified or trained. The argument here, however, is that 'one swallow doesn't make a summer' and that, however good these people might be as 'natural' teachers, their skills may be considerably improved by an appropriate course of initial teacher education. Schott commented (concerning the education and training of all levels of teachers),

> *"There is evidence in the research that affective competences are critical to a a teacher's success or failure. Certainly, school administrators believe these competences are important or they would not be included as consistently as they are in teacher evaluation procedures."*
>
> (Schott, 1989, p.43)

What is clear is that the eight areas listed are quite differently organised and emphasised in different countries. For example, in many European countries, and to a limited extent in USA and Canada, curricular time is seriously devoted

to the philosophies and ideas of key educational thinkers (eg. Comenius, Pestalozzi, Froebel and Dewey). Unfortunately this is not the case in England and Wales today. We should also note that the relative balance between, or emphasis given to these areas can vary considerably according to the age level of children intended. There are, for instance, real tensions between secondary teacher knowledge and early childhood teacher knowledge. Bernstein talked of this in terms of classification and framing, positing that the framing was desirably weak at the lower age ranges (Bernstein, 1971), a point no longer deemed fashionable in England as we listen to official exhortations for specialist subject teaching even at the lower age range of the primary school!

Current British approaches

Clearly, no other country in the 'developed' world has yet embarked upon such an extreme 'apprenticeship' model of teacher preparation as has Britain. The establishment of a quango to oversee teacher 'training' (the Teacher Training Agency, TTA) has created a body not easily subject to criticism or control by either higher education or the teaching profession as a whole. Moreover that this is an undemocratic body and one concerned to press certain views of 'desirable routes into teaching' has not escaped the notice of either the universities or the teachers themselves. But, for the most part, they have been powerless to alter the current position. Whilst many countries throughout the 'developed' world are lengthening and strengthening teacher preparation courses and embedding them ever more securely in higher education, Britain remains resolute that its new approach (virtually a nineteenth century apprenticeship system) is the best way to secure the future of its children. A key feature in all this has been the partial removal of authority for teacher education from the universities and, despite the rhetoric, away from the profession. All this has been undertaken under the banner of 'the greater need for partnership and practical experience'; in a country, moreover, which had some of the largest amounts of practical experience in the world in its initial teacher education. This process of improvement or attrition (depending on your views) was started in Britain in 1984 with an earlier (now defunct) quango, The Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, CATE. This had a much more benign and creative perspective of teacher education more akin to NCATE in USA. Its successes were in large measure due to the untiring work of a major educator/chairman, Sir William Taylor, a man who

understood teacher education and tried hard to balance competing ideologies through rational discourse and analysis. Few would disagree with the view that, for a short time, teacher education was subject to a scrutiny which was channelled to the ultimate good of the children and the profession. Certainly the courses thus approved were not limited or merely 'technicist', though, even then, teacher educators were never allowed to occupy more than 25% of any guiding committee. (Hardly a measure of respect for teacher educators!) The signs were ominous and the strident criticisms of teacher education continued unabated.

However the recent past is interpreted, the key elements in **current** British approaches certainly seem somewhat less amenable to rational discourse. The funding mechanism adopted for teacher education is now removed from that used for 'normal' university funding. No longer will it take place via routes similar to that of other professions (i.e. through the Higher Education Funding Council for England, HEFCE), but through the quango TTA. The change in name to 'agency' is not cosmetic, but coincides with the current trend towards embedding educational language and concepts within the values and structures of the business world. An agency is consonant with views redolent of the language of the market place and of competition. These are entirely compatible with current official perspectives of education itself. The TTA seeks to fund models of 'training' of which it approves, and one of its senior executives declared she wished to see as many routes into teaching as possible and did not wish to see certain would-be teachers 'put-off' by the hurdle of conventional university initial education courses (verbatim comment by Anthea Millett at Nottingham University, 1995). There is a marked encouragement of School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) courses run by schools in conjunction with the Department for Education in England (DFEE).

Criticism of teacher education

Graves makes the point that, in many respects, criticisms of teacher education by the 'radical right' in England have been invalid. Such criticisms were often founded on a nostalgic and half-recalled view of teachers who were 'disciplinarians', or upon a rosy view of the hey-day of British Grammar Schools, which until the 1960s' advent of comprehensive secondary education (high schools), tended to segregate the education of approximately the top 25%

of British children (selected at age eleven by means of intelligence, verbal reasoning and maths scores) and send lesser mortals to an education deemed inferior. An oft-repeated and long-running criticism of teacher trainers is that too much child development, the study of sociology and attention to 'barmy' pedagogical theory so misled the teachers of the sixties and seventies, that standards of attainment and discipline fell. (There is little evidence of falls in the former and much to the contrary.) As a result, the society became dissolute and uncompetitive largely because of poor teaching. Such perspectives abounded in the popular press and much of the criticism was focused upon one particular Education Report, the Plowden Report of 1967. This imaginative, detailed and careful report would appear to have been thoroughly misrepresented by journalists, ministers and civil servants alike. Much of the earlier strident criticism was represented by the publication (late 1960s and early 1970s) of three 'Black Papers', which decried 'progressive' education and the ways in which teachers had been 'deliberately' misled by their educators and trainers.

We should also recall that, in both Europe and North America, the effects of the oil embargoes of the 1970s and the consequent recessions hastened that process, alluded to above, whereby the language of education became fundamentally altered. Increasingly, the terms of industry and commerce were heard when describing educational processes. Children were 'units'. Schools could be 'managed'. Curricula could be 'delivered'. School-based outcomes 'measured' and compared. The drive to be competitive was paramount. Comments on the nature of 'the real world' were commonly used to back up the need for children to compete, to fail, to strive, to win. Co-operation and shared endeavours were ridiculed as the result of 'half-baked' sociological studies. The Prime Minister of the day declared 'society' to be a nonsense word.

All this is to vastly compress and over-simplify complex recent historical forces and ideologies. It is important to note that in some cases the criticisms do have elements of rationality and basis. Some of these criticisms resulted from the example of extreme foolishness in one or two cases. [In England in 1975 the exposure of one extremely badly-run primary school, The William Tyndale School, led to a long-running court case and a major government report (Auld, 1976).] There have been similar examples of notoriety in Canada and the USA. The tendency then, is for these single cases to leave **residues** in political

minds such that whole movements can be fuelled by them. Since there is a great deal of ambiguity and fluidity in modern, post-industrial society, it is all too easy to see the increase in single parents, or in crime, as somehow the 'fault' of the schools. It is then so easy to connect this to the presumed fault of the trainers of teachers. If you add such elements as uneasiness over the pace of change or in the decline in good manners (as YOU see it), it is but a short leap to a position whereby you hold past practice to be superior. We should also recall that in England, there is always the different experience of the élite to be contended with. Something approaching 10% of British children have experienced private schooling. It is often remarked that, in the recent past, such schools employed graduates 'unsullied' by the experience of initial teacher education. Indeed the Chief Inspector of Schools (a very senior government approved position in England) remarked,

> *"The good quality provision made by some 'untrained' teachers in independent schools (including very prestigious ones) counters the view that there is a necessary relationship between high quality teaching, good quality curricular provision and teacher training."*
>
> (letter to M. Lally, 1995)

Teacher education for those teaching young children

It is clearly impossible to separate teacher education from the role of the teacher in general. Fitness for purpose is paramount. But, as societies demand more from teachers, ie that they recognise special needs early, or that they 'rescue', socialise, re-create motivation, 'provide' imaginative, flexible children who will become imaginative flexible adults, yet at the same time stick to traditional values (whatever they were), the demands on preparation grow more not less.

Over twenty years ago Ryan said that the problem (in the USA) was not one of not knowing **how** to prepare teachers properly, rather it was the constant problem of wanting to train them very cheaply and simply (Ryan, in Schott, op cit). In Britain we have been through some twenty-five years of very convoluted approaches. In the 1960s we were told that Teacher Training Colleges were wrongly named. They became (ultimately) Colleges of Higher Education, were absorbed into, or became Polytechnics and (in 1993)

universities. By 1980 four year B.Ed degrees were common modes of education and training for the teachers of the young. Secondary teachers still tended to 'add on' one year of postgraduate teacher preparation. We were then told the B.Ed. degree was inadequate and that the monitoring of teacher TRAINING would be more rigorous. More recently still a previous minister of education announced that practice was much more important than theory. "*Barmy*" theory, he called it. New routes into teaching were proposed. 'Licensed teacher' routes (little more than apprenticeship modes of 'sitting by Nellie') are being tried. A system of part-time approaches to training have been set up via the Open University and some University Schools of Education. The initial teacher education curriculum and the amount of school experience are now massively constrained, shaped and controlled and dictated to through a variety of govenment circulars. Consortia of schools are openly invited to train teachers.

In all this there have been some astonishing attempts to pressurise universities and colleges to move back to a three (and possibly two) year qualification and to encourage teachers of primary age children to follow the degree plus post graduate year route (an acknowledged poor mode for dealing with the polymath needs of small primary schools). There are now published criteria to ensure that prospective teachers of three to six-year-olds follow virtually the same 'training' routes as the teachers of the older children and that they pay particular attention to the testing at seven and eleven years of age (the so called 'key-stages' one and two of the National Curriculum).

What is necessary?

It would seem necessary at the end of this short paper to return to the premise that fitness for purpose is paramount.

The overwhelming evidence from throughout the world is that **early years education pays;** it pays handsomely. Most politicians seem to be becoming convinced that it pays socially. More may also begin to see, from the work of Sylva (op.cit), or of Daniels (1995) or of Schweinhart and Weikart (1993), that it also pays in terms of cognitive gains. It is important, however, not to see either these social or cognitive gains as simply arising from a watered down grade-school or secondary school approach. They arise from circumstances

where there are sure signs of appropriate staff for the purpose. (In this respect the results of the Effective Early Learning , EEL, project of Pascal et al, 1995, will be interesting) Whilst the pivotal role of a good teacher may be necessary, it may be even more important that there is a good TEAM. This leads one to the point that modes of early childhood education really appear to operate best within a multidisciplinary group of professionals and associates; a group where carers, assistants, ancillaries, teachers and parents work together in the full knowledge that care and education are probably best assumed to be inseparable during the period of about three to eight years.

This means that the **Early Childhood Professional** might take several routes for his/her education and training. It means we have to -

- Recognise that education and care are so interlocked between birth and, probably, latency, that we HAVE to ensure that specialist knowledge and expertise also interlock.
- It means that a senior professional plans the learning environment and bases it on a profound understanding of and observation of his/her charges.
- It means there are clear standards of practice (ie. that 'quality control' is clear, reasonably uniform and explicit).
- It assumes a clear code of ethics and values; AND this may imply some considerable ability to question policy and to help regulate it.
- It implies commitment to education and training which is repeated, real and rigorous. (ie. It means not only high levels of initial education and training, but a commitment to continued concern for the ideas and knowledge base of the profession.)
- It commits the professionals to the constant articulation of principles and practices to those who question them.

As societies develop ever more rapidly, as children become more sophisticated, as family structures change, as technology becomes central to the lives of all, so the role which early childhood education plays becomes large and more complex. The age of entry to kindergarten or nursery becomes ever younger in many countries. The original role of the teacher expands like a stella nova. Team work becomes essential and watered-down elementary practices ever more inappropriate. At the same time, that expansion of the media into everyones' lives ensures a different pace of life, a different form of accountability and, often, a trivialisation of fundamental values. Politicians

demand 'quick fixes'. This is the era of sound-bites and the instant expert. Through all this it is tempting to see schooling, even that of the very young, as instrumental, quickly assayed. Any professional mystique is derided; anything not properly explained assumed mere obscurantism. In all this the early childhood educator has to be exactly as Saracho characterised; and the education and training must fit it:

a decision maker, observer, organiser of instruction, diagnostician, curriculum designer, manager of learning and counsellor/adviser; all of which take place within the parameters of a growing and sensitive understanding of child development and human worth (Saracho,1984)

None of this, neither the six elements, nor the eight core areas, can be done in a trice; nor can they be done well, in my opinion, outside of effective higher education. They can only be accomplished through genuine partnerships between policy-makers, the public and the profession. Stalin is reputed to have said (to H.G. Wells in 1936) *"where teachers fail, the shock troops will stamp"*.

Policy makers, politicians, industrialists, parents and teachers owe it to generations of unborn children that teacher education flourishes and develops. Nowhere is dialogue more important than with those who teach the young. In the world of the future the health and unity of those much changed societies may well depend on getting the right mix of professionals who give out such that there is cohesion, harmony and real human development.

Ben Morris once claimed that he saw the best in the 'modern kindergarten', where there was an understanding of *"individual development and (of) the inward and emotional nature of that development"*. He said,

> *"The development of confidence in one's own genuine powers - however limited these may be - is the first essential of personal growth, and such confidence is rooted in an attitude to the world which finds it a good place the people in it worthy of trust and love. In the beginning, belief in ourselves depends on someone else having believed in us, having cared for us, having loved us. This is the first responsibility of parents and teachers ..."*
>
> (Morris, 1972, p.261)

That's a rubric fit to educate and train teachers by!

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The continuing professional development of early childhood educators: planning contexts and development principles

by Christopher Day

Early years educators are uniquely placed to influence children's lives. They have the opportunity, for example, through the ways in which they present themselves, to promote learning as a process in which the learner is dependent upon, interdependent with or independent from the teacher and other learners. They can encourage or discourage inquiry among their children; segment work and play or integrate them; create and develop learning partnerships with parents, or merely involve them in a limited way; provide a vision of what might be a foundation for the different kinds of learning in which their children will have to engage throughout their lives if they are to continue to grow and find purposeful work in the world of continuous, fragmental change which they are entering. If children are to be supported in 'starting right' in their attitudes to, and valuing of practices as lifelong learners, educators themselves will need to provide active role models.

This chapter focuses upon different aspects of continuing professional learning and development, and the ways in which the continuing professional development of teachers and other educators may be supported. Continuing professional development (CPD) is defined as **all those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school and which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom**. It is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment to teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge and skills essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues through each phase of their teaching lives. The discussion is based upon ten assumptions about learning and development, teaching, and continuing professional development (CPD).

(a) Learning and development

- educators' own learning is implicit. It will occur at different times, in response to different circumstances, and will result in different

outcomes. The nature of learning is that it is often ad hoc, unrecorded and unremarked.

- CPD implies **planned intervention** into educators' natural learning lives. If the intervention is effective it should result in **systematic learning**. Thus development is different from learning in that it is planned, contiguous and recorded. It is the responsibility of the individual **and** the employing organisation, since its success is in the interests of both.

- educators' learning and development are constrained by practical, social and psychological factors.

(b) Teaching

- teaching is a complex and frequently stressful occupation. Subject knowledge, pedagogic knowledge, technical and organisational skills have to be regularly reviewed, reflected upon and updated. Reflective teaching is, therefore, not only desirable but essential.

- reflective teaching requires that knowledge and skills are applied in a **context of understanding** of the child and his/her developmental phases.

- teachers need humanity, care and commitment in order to relate their moral purposes, understandings, knowledge and skills successfully to the children they teach.

- teaching requires the co-ordinated application of the head and the heart (i.e. it is both rational and non-rational).

(c) Continuing professional development

- educators must be actively involved in their own learning. As with children, adults cannot **be developed** passively, but only be given opportunities **to develop** actively.

- whilst the aim of all CPD must be to improve the learning and achievement opportunities for children in the classroom, there is no direct 'cause and effect' relationship between the two, i.e. a more

effective teacher will not necessarily be able to guarantee more effective learning. He/she can only guarantee better opportunities for learning.

- in the light of the above assumptions, professional development must be:
    a. lifelong, i.e. contain balance, progression and continuity
    b. differentiated, i.e. targeted upon individual and collective needs
    c. relevant, i.e. to the particular work context and life phase of the teacher
    d. coherent, i.e. make sense to the teacher in relation to personal as well as institutional short, mid and long term needs.

The learning world of the early childhood educator

The teaching world is characterised by its **busyness**, isolation and **stress**. Referring to a plethora of research, Fullan points to the limitations which the large number of unpredictable short interactions demanding instant responses place upon reflection in the classroom:

> *"It draws their focus to day-to-day effects or a short-term perspective; ... it limits their opportunities for sustained reflection about what they do ... it tends to increase the dependence of teachers on the experiential knowledge necessary for day-to-day coping, to the exclusion of sources of knowledge beyond their own classroom experience ..."*
>
> (Fullan and Stiegelbauer, 1991, p.34)

Educators have come to rely upon their accrued personal practical knowledge because it is necessary in order to survive. Whilst the classroom is filled with people, individual adult educators are often isolated in terms of development opportunities with colleagues. At the very best, they may be part of a team. However, its members will have particular functions and may be either unavailable at the time of need or be unable to provide appropriate knowledge of the situation at the time required. The socially interactive nature of classrooms and, beyond this, the conditions of service, often ensure teaching is primarily 'contact with children', not allowing sufficient time for planning and reflection. If classrooms are designated as learning venues for children only,

educators have to find their learning opportunities outside. Handy points to the strangeness of this:

> *"What sensible organisation would forbid its workers to ask their colleagues for help, would expect them to carry all relevant facts in their heads, would require them to work in 35 minute spells and then move to a different site, would work them in groups of thirty or over and prohibit any social interaction except at official break times ..."*
>
> (Handy, 1989, p173)

Whilst this applies more to those working with older children and young people, it is, nevertheless, relevant to early childhood educators.

The social milieu of the classroom, then, constrains the educator's on-the-job learning. In addition, it conspires to predispose educators to favour only forms and contents of learning which appear to be readily applicable to their immediate practical classroom survival needs (e.g. subject knowledge updates, curriculum policy implementation, new assessment procedures). **Whilst these may be necessary for survival, they are not sufficient for development**. The social conditions of teaching which are designed to promote children's learning, can paradoxically, inhibit the development of their educators, promoting 'short termist' perspectives, in which classroom repertoires and routines become implicit means of limiting rather than developing professional learning opportunities.

The learning limitations of the classroom may be compounded by the training history of the educator who may have been 'brought up' to believe in a self perpetuating image of the 'good' teacher as one on whom everything must depend, as an expert and 'self made' (Britzman, 1986). (I can remember myself being somewhat surprised when, as a young teacher in my first school, I began early on to realise that (a) not everyone in my class was motivated to learn by my teaching approaches, and (b) I was unable to provide an answer to all the questions I was asked. In the school staffroom I quickly learned that 'theory' was something 'out there' and not relevant to 'practice'. Professional 'folklore' asserts that the most valued part of training is that which takes place in the workplace. It was not until sometime later, however, that I realised that in order to develop as a teacher educator I needed to revisit and learn more about the 'why' and the 'how' of teaching as well as the 'what'. As well as reflecting 'in' or 'during' my teaching, I also needed to reflect 'on' and 'about' my teaching in a more contemplative, systematic way.)

Educators develop and hold theories about children, what they teach and the roles they play, that tend to be implicit. Because they are embedded in practice and appear necessary for survival, they become **instruments of control rather than development**. Many years ago now, Argyris and Schon (1976) described this learning context as 'single loop', and advocated that those who wished to develop their thinking and practice should engage in 'double loop' learning in which the private, implicit learning world is, voluntarily, subject to critical scrutiny. Such a move does, however, inevitably involve the challenge and support of others.

In summary, being a professional implies

- a commitment to the interests of children by reflection on their well being and their progress and deciding how best it can be fostered or promoted;
- an obligation to review periodically the nature and effectiveness of one's practice in order to improve the quality of one's management, pedagogy and decision-making;
- an obligation to continue to develop one's professional knowledge both by personal reflection and through interaction with others (Eraut, 1993).

Children deserve to be taught by good teachers, therefore it is a responsibility of the school or other employers to provide these. At present all that is **guaranteed** is that there will be teachers and an agreed curriculum. Whilst there is much investment in initial training and development, such investment is less in evidence for qualified teachers. There are two main issues here: (i) the broader political culture and whether it provides an appropriately resourced framework for CPD; (ii) whether the school and local community culture themselves are supportive of CPD.

Trends in CPD

After several years in the job, teachers may well become, 'frayed around the edges', commitment may decline, as may their energy levels. A lack of attention to career development may be accompanied by a sense of 'inconsequentiality' as enthusiasm gives way to frustration in response to

personal, work-related or societal stressors (Farber, 1991, p.35). By mid-career they may have become disenchanted (Hargreaves, 1993) and *"experience a reduction of personal investment, feelings of fatigue, having to renounce one's professional ideals"* (Huberman, 1993, p.97).

In England, changes in government policy in recent years have ensured that more resources for CPD have been devolved directly to schools. One consequence of this has been a sharp decline in the numbers of teachers enrolling on full-time Masters degree programmes (Triggs and Francis, 1990); another has been the growth of 'short burst', half or one day 'training' activities. Many of these have been related directly to the implementation of externally inspired innovation, characterised by immediacy. There is some evidence that this lack of coherence and continuity produces feelings of cynicism, frustration and dissatisfaction among teachers (Cowan and Wright, 1990) and that the events are largely concerned with awareness raising and information giving (Newton and Newton, 1994). In Australia, too, the trend towards instrumentality, technical proficiency and competence means:

> *"Rather than developing reflective practitioners who are able to understand, challenge and transform their practice, in-service education in its current form encourages the development of teachers who see the world in terms of instrumental ends achievable through the recipes of 'tried and true' practices legitimated by unexamined experience or uncritically accepted research findings."*
>
> (Sachs and Logan,1990)

If this trend is indeed increasing nationally, then it rests with the local communities and schools themselves to bear the burden of responsibility to ensure that the essential 'moral qualities' of educators continue to be nurtured.

Moral purposes of teaching

> *"Moral qualities are directly relevant to any kind of classroom practice: care for the pupils, enthusiasm for the subject, conscientiousness, determination, willingness to co-operate with colleagues and a host of others. Nobody, at least on reflection, really believes that effective teaching - let alone reflective education - can be reduced to a set of skills; it requires certain dispositions of character. The attempt to avoid*

the question of what these dispositions are by employing pseudo-practical terms like 'competence' or 'professional' must fail."

(Wilson, 1993, p 113)

Above all, teaching is an interpersonal activity intended to influence what people become as persons. Sockett defines four dimensions of this activity: **community** (which provides a framework of relationships); **knowledge or expertise** (with technique subservient to moral criteria); **accountability** (to learners and their families); and **ideals** (Sockett, 1993, p13). Since they are concerned with the betterment of their children, all educators may be said to have moral purpose.

School support for CPD

One of the most important responsibilities of the school and community leadership is to ensure that the climate is one in which ongoing adult learning can flourish alongside pupil learning (Stoll, 1994). Over the years various terms have been coined which describe the kind of leadership and culture appropriate to this. Here I simply cite evidence from research on school effectiveness and improvement in support of the necessity of creating a working environment which is conducive to ongoing professional development. Harris and Russ (1995) found that a **collaborative** leadership style made a significant contribution to staff morale and teaching performance and that, "*schools which were demonstrating improvement were those in which staff development was a powerful component*". Furthermore:

"In the 'improving' schools individual teachers were encouraged to be learners themselves. Staff were encouraged to collaborate by learning with and from each other. In direct contrast, where schools did not provide the opportunity for staff to discuss teaching methods in detail or to engage in joint planning, there was less evidence of an ongoing commitment among staff to professional development. When questioned in more depth, teachers at the latter type of school revealed certain common attitudes about themselves as teachers and their own professional learning. .... it became clear that the schools were organised in ways that encouraged teachers to develop coping strategies rather than supporting them in self-sustaining professional development."

(Harris and Russ, 1995, para 5.3)

Sammon's, Hillman's and Mortimore's identification of eleven key characteristics of effective schools provides corroborative evidence in support of this. Three of these relate directly to CPD. They found that effective schools have:

1. **Professional leadership** which is purposeful and participative.

2. **A learning organisation** in which the school presents learning as something which is for adults as well as children, and provides training and development for all its staff.

3. **Home-school partnership** in which parents become actively involved in their children's work and in the life of the school (DFEE, 1995).

Whilst none of these findings will surprise the reader, it is as well to remember that CPD opportunities should last across every educators' career span. This prompts the writer to ask, *"What do we know about the learning or development lives of teachers that may assist in ensuring that appropriate support may be provided?" "How can educators themselves best participate in the planning of their own development?"*

The development lives of teachers: transcending competency

A growing body of literature is focusing upon teachers' career development and various general phases have been identified. Leithwood (1990), identifies five stages (1) Career entry (2) Stabilisation (3) Experimentation (new challenges and concerns) (4) Serenity or Disenchantment (on reaching a plateau) and (5) Disengagement (preparing for retirement). Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) developed a five stage model of skill acquisition which emphasises learning through experience. This broadly based theory of expertise or **competence development** is dependent upon a growth in situational understanding in which:

> *"the pathway to competence is characterised mainly by the ability to recognise features of practical situations and to discriminate between them, to carry out routine procedures under pressure and to plan ahead"*
> (Eraut, 1994, p.125)

Figure 1 Summary of Dreyfus model of skills acquisition

Level 1 Novice

- Rigid adherence to taught rules or plans
- Little situational perception
- No discretionary judgement

Level 2 Advanced beginner

- Guidelines for action based on attributes or aspects (aspects are global characteristics of situations recognisable only after some prior experience)
- Situational perception still limited
- All attributes and aspects are treated separately and given equal importance

Level 3 Competent

- Coping with multiple demands
- Now sees actions at least partially in terms of longer-term goals
- Conscious deliberate planning
- Standardised and routinised procedures

Level 4 Proficient

- See situations holistically rather than in terms of aspects
- See what is most important in a situation
- perceives deviations from the normal pattern
- Decision-making less laboured
- Uses maxims for guidance, whose meaning varies according to the situation

Level 5 Expert

- No longer relies on rules, guidelines or maxims
- Intuitive grasp of situations based on deep tacit understanding
- Analytic approaches used only in novel situation or when problems occur
- Vision of what is possible

(Eraut, 1994, p.124)

Four major criticisms of the 'model' have been made, despite its obvious attractiveness. First, it neglects the issue of 'expert fallibility' (Eraut, 1994,

p 128). Being 'an expert' should not imply that further development is unnecessary. Indeed, it may mean that expertise itself is used as a defence against further learning. Second, is that whilst the model is based upon how people approach their work, there may be a temptation to use it as a means of grading their abilities in their work. Indeed, there is some evidence of this in the developments in Initial Teacher Education referred to in the previous chapter (Gammage). The third criticism is that it implies a 'stage' development path, thus ignoring the effect of crucial or specific environment and personal life factors on development. A fourth criticism is stated by Wilson (1993) in the quotation already cited, that effective teaching *"cannot be reduced to a set of skills"*.

Burke, et al. (1984) in examining social influences, suggested that positive nurturing (present in effective schools) will assist teachers, whereas conflictive environments have negative effects; and Ball and Goodson (1985) found that a linear conception of development is problematic. So to regard key points in educators' development which should be particularly targeted for support as relating principally to role changes, e.g. induction, preparation for a new role etc. is to ignore the vast majority of potential need amongst 'everyday educators'. Development is multidimensional:

> *"... The fact that typical factors can be found should not hide the fact that there are some people who never stop exploring, who never stabilise or who de-stabilise for psychological reasons; a sudden awareness, a change of interest or values. Discontinuities may occur from extrinsic forces, such as accidents, political events or economic crises."*
>
> (Huberman, 1993, p.4)

How, then, taking factors of environment, personal history, and life phases into account, may continuing professional development be most effectively promoted?

Planning for continuing professional development: an approach to lifelong development

The conditions of teaching in many countries are such that teaching is becoming or has come to be regarded as an 'unreflective technical process ... (with) ... 'quality' as synonymous with meeting pre-specified 'standards', through a system of supervision, inspection and control' (Carr, 1989, p2).

Other chapters in the book provide testimony to this. It is clear from research and practice that good teaching is anything **but** technical or unreflective. The changing world of the learner, the impact of new technologies, and the changing demands of the world of work, all have implications for the kinds of teaching and learning, with which early years educators must engage and the 'dispositions' which they must foster. In Canada, the Sullivan Commission Report declared that:

> *"In view of the new social and economic realities, all students, regardless of their immediate plans following school, will need to develop a flexibility and versatility undreamed of by previous generations ..."*
>
> (Ministry of Education, 1991,p.2)

In America, as well as the applied version of the three Rs, employers want 'a set of behavioural skills that are not taught at all in traditional academic curricula, such as problem solving, communication skills, interpersonal skills and leadership' (Carnevale, 1994).

Teachers are at the heart of the lifelong learning endeavour. They are expected more than ever **to make a difference** in the lives of their pupils. Investing in education means investing in the continuing professional development of teachers. In Australia, this is already recognised:

> *"... if teachers are to perform the highly complex and responsible roles that will be required of them in Australia' short term future, their own ongoing education must be re-vamped in terms of the value placed upon it, the approaches used, and the assumption of responsibility for it ..."*
>
> (Crowther and Postle, 1991, p.1)

The kinds of 'revamping' which have resulted from various government reforms in England and elsewhere simply fail to match either the spirit or the letter of what is required. The introduction of teacher performance appraisal, given a positive developmental environment in school, provides a potential opportunity for systematic review and targeting. Unfortunately, whilst self-appraisal is a part of the process, appraisal itself is still regarded as being primarily in the interests of the 'managers' who introduced it. Funding for continuing professional development has been distributed in different ways through the school system. The net effect is more school-based work, more short term training based upon institutional need, and less development work

which might focus upon longer term need or promote the kinds of reflective practices described earlier.

If support for lifelong learning for early years educators is to move beyond political rhetoric then it must involve a recognition that learning is **everyone's** business. Early years educators, with their twin ethics of caring and partnerships are well placed to promote **personal development profiles**. Whilst portfolios represent a collection of experience, profiles are a considered selection, synthesis and evaluation, which together with forward planning, provide continuity and progression, relevance (to individual and institutionally defined need), differentiation and coherence. These would enable every early years educator, with the assistance of 'critical friends' from the school and community as participants, to establish, maintain, develop and, where necessary, change his or her vision for education. In schools which do not already have annual, reviewable and renewable development planning procedures in which staff participate actively, which do not already encourage collegiality and collaboration, which do not welcome parental and community involvement, which do not recognise that education involves the whole person, head and heart, and which are not founded upon a shared vision of the child growing up, the introduction of personal development profiles may prove difficult. In developing schools,

> *"The learning organisation cannot support personal mastery without supporting personal mastery in all aspects of life. It cannot foster shared vision without calling forth personal visions, and personal visions are always multifaceted - they always include deeply felt desires for our personal, professional, organisational and family lives ..."*
>
> (Senge, 1990, p.307)

It follows that continuing professional development must be conceptualised as applying to the development, short and long term, of teacher **as person.** Planning for coherence, differentiation, progression and continuity, can account for individual and institutional need, life and career developmental phases and internal and external working environments.

In effect, though ownership would be in the hands of the individual, it would form a learning contract between the individual and the school, the school and the community. It would guarantee for the community that educators will continue throughout their careers to provide the knowledge, skills, commitment, care and vision appropriate to the changing needs of pupils and

society. It would guarantee for the school that the teacher would participate fully in maintaining its growth as a learning organisation, and it would guarantee for the early years educator that both school and community would provide tangible support and genuine commitment for his or her development.

Conclusion

Successful models of professional development for the 1990s and beyond must assert connections between thinking about children's learning, its planning and practice. This best occurs through **self-generated,** reflective work, which is relevant to the individual teacher as well as to the organisation, and which is shared and enhanced through appropriate intervention which challenges and supports. Higher education has a key role to play in this, as do collaborative school cultures which build and develop strategies for challenge and support within the notion of teacher autonomy. Both recognise the need for teachers to retain a high degree of control over the direction of their work and the confidentiality surrounding their contributions, whilst at the same time having access to appropriate critical support.

Essentially, successful professional development in the future will need to be based upon close knowledge of the factors which constitute 'need' and which genuinely support the need in the short and long-term context. Government and school policy may thus, through continuing dialogue between all stakeholders, become more consonant with individually defined needs and supportive of teacher autonomy. In this way the move towards treating the teacher as technician will be prevented. Personal development profiling provides one means by which teachers, the schools' greatest asset, may be actively involved in their own growth and, through this, play their full part in improving schools.

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Christopher Day is Chair of the School of Education at the University of Nottingham, and Head of Advanced Studies. He has authored and edited many books on management, leadership, on continuing professional development, and on the curriculum. He is editor of a major international education journal, a frequent key-note speaker throughout the world, and one with wide experience of North America, Europe and Scandinavia, holding a Swedish, as well as a British Doctorate. He has worked as a teacher, as a local education authority adviser, as a teacher trainer, and also directed several research projects on aspects of continuing professional development.

Shannon Fletcher has taught pre-school and primary grades in both Canada and the United States. Her training and professional experience have helped her gain areas of expertise in both special education and in early childhood education. She has taught workshops in the areas of integration, teaching strategies for children with special educational needs, building an inclusive classroom, portfolio development and assessment.

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Children from Normanton Village Infant School, Derby provided the drawings used in the front cover design and the title page.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: THE WAY FORWARD

In the book *Early Childhood Education: Taking Stock*, published in 1993, the writers focused on significant issues which were challenging early years educators at that time, and which threatened positive developments in the education of young children in the UK. Such was the concern at the time that this book soon sold out.

Two years on, this new book examines principles and practice which point to **'the way forward'**, indicating ways of overcoming some of the regressive influences on early childhood education during recent years. Examination of the context for change is the starting point for consideration of the expansion and the nature of provision for young children and their families; the question of high quality learning opportunities for all children; effective home-school partnerships; ensuring appropriate initial teacher education and continuing professional development.

The writers, from both the UK and North America, draw upon wider comparative experience, and overall reject an imposed 'top/down' model for change, emphasising instead, a 'bottom/up' approach, building on co-operative learning and evaluation by all those involved in the care and education of young children. To paraphrase Lillian de Lissa (1939), the pioneer of early childood from Australia, we must *'build with vision and courage on the foundation already laid'*.

This is essential reading for all involved in the education of young children.

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ISBN 1 871526 21 3